THE LAST HOURS OF EUROPE

ADRIANO ROMUALDI

BERSERKER

BOOKS

ADRIANO ROMUALDI
POET OF EUROPE

"The Soviet-German campaigns were the most terrible war ever has ever been fought. The number of deaths was enormous. The great assemblies of Leningrad , Stalingrad and Sevastopol recall the wars of others times , but field operations were something new . They marked the peak of industrial (pre-nuclear) warfare" ' .

"Paris, 7 June 1944.

Heavy tanks marched towards the front on the Boulevard de l' Amiral Bruix . _ _ _ The young crews sat on the steel giants , living the hours before in that kind of joy based on melancholy , which I remember so well . It was obvious
their, very vivid, the nearness of death, the glory of the passing of hearts I was prone to fiery death .

How the machines lost their reality , how they disappeared into them every complication, as they became vain at the same time more simple and more significant, like the shield and the spear, on which the hoplite rests ! And as the young people sat on the *Panzers,* they ate and drank , delicate with each other like newlyweds on the eve of the .their party, almost in a spiritual banquet !"°.

« During the Second World War countless men lost their lives to give Europe a new order , to build , to
beyond the sad democratic myths , the new state of authority and justice . Today the sacrifice of those men, who fell within sight of the Nile or the Vol-

I ¥. Calvocoressi — G. Wint, *History of the Second* World *War* , Rizzoli, Milan 1980, p. 494 (ed. or. Penguin, London 1972).

E. Stinger, *Irradiations. Diary 1941.1945,* Longanesi, Milan 1983, p. 429 (ed. or. Klett, Stuttgart 1955).

ga, murdered on the lakes of Lombardy or in the vast plain of the Ile de France , is unknown, cursed, held up to the hatred of bread. But we feel that so much blood has not flowed in vain, that it is an invisible energy that prevents the tree of Western civilization from rotting irremediably . And we feel, and know, that the dead still live , that, as the words of the flr ›rsf *Wessel Lied* say , *"Kymaraden, die Rotfroiit*
mn Reid:tien shot, riiarshin'n inn innnn innn Reilien niit ",
"the comrades killed by the red front and by the reaction still march in our ranks "»'.

Sixty ***years later***

Almost sixty years have passed since those £//time *hours ùv'l1'Eiirn;in,* tragically punctuated by the episodes narrated in this book: about the time of two generations. Sixty years which are not at all enough to ensure that today we look at that era with detachment and serenity . Reopening the pages of this and other books on the same theme , we come across the signs and _
to the gravestones that dot our cities , observing the videos that immortalized the episodes of those years, which we still feel today the doltxe for a deep wound . And the feeling of all that _
you are lost and will never be again. Yet, I couldn't turn it around look elsewhere. This is, at the same time, the tragic story of our violated , defeated, tortured and humiliated continent , and the first and fundamental reason for the troubles of our era.

At the end of the war , the military, political and cultural occupation of our continent began . Miserable figures of clowns, with festively colored dresses to satisfy the different tastes of the masses, have usurped the places of the old European political institutions . Int‹x- no to them, crowds of careerists, even more shameful than clowns: for obtain personal advantages ape the ideals of Europe, what it was when it still had sovereignty, dignity and power. The careerists poison the minds of those many who, without a clear ideological and cultural forroazi ‹xre , nevertheless present more noble ideals, and that thus I become confused, blinded, drugged and stunned.

Since those tragic hours sixty years ago , the group of

A. Romualdi, *Robert Bratillach, goal of fascism,* Introduzicme a R. Brasitlich , *Letter to a soldier of the class of '40,* Settimo S igillo, Rome 1997', p. 19.

vioii has decreased even more . **Some,** stuck in hagiography and tired commemoration , have for this very reason abandoned every pretense of understanding and modifying a completely alien world : their very museum attitude has condemned them
to the end. Others have attempted to open ways or paths out of the thick in the bush, often getting lost in the itinerary; still others have decided to make the forest itself their own impregnable homeland . "On the other hand", noted the author of this book, "the
the very conditions of modern life operate a counter-selection regarding everything that is character "' .

In the desolation, having lost many ties and contacts, they wander around now mostly solitary figures: surly, shy and severe individuals , made impossible by the drama of the times .

Retrace the tragic epic of the fighters for honor
of Europe is not just a painful duty : it is also the way of keeping alive the awareness of our of being. to affirm one
ideal continuity with our fallen and to honor them: for this reason we must pass on the memory of the Second World War and
of the fall of our continent. In this way the pain is associated with a profound certainty, which strengthens the soul: that of being the links in a chain that continues to exist , despite everything,
even in dark times like the current ones. With the work of safeguarding memory we prevent mud from covering the memory of
nobles: in the future, perhaps, young people will still be able to know true models of heroism and nobility .

The catastrophe of Europe, in the orgy of blood in which it was consumed , saw the tragic end of many of our nationals : Germans
and Italians, but also Hungarians, Romanians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Ukrainian, Danish, Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian , French, Spanish ...
"the New Order", wrote Romualdi in ***Ideas for*** arm *culture*
of the Right, " it would not have been at all that abominable thing depicted by radical-communist propaganda , but an order that was always
better than the one imposed by Moscow. Romanians knew this well
and Hungarians, Croats and Slovaks who fought with the Jfe/irinacùt against the Soviets . The integration of industrial Germany
with the agricultural East he would have created a new sphere of prosperity

A. Romualdi, *Nietzsche and the mythology of equality,* Ar, Padua 1981 (1st ed. 1971), p. 79.

from the Baltic to the Black Sea . The area of modern German civilization and Central European would have radiated to the East, up to the Urals, contributing to the development of the Soviet peoples , while instead - ne1 1945 — it was Russian semi -barbarism that imposed more primitive conditions of life in Eastern *and* Central Europe. Also *certf* preconceived hostility towards the Slavs was destined to soften in the face of the reality of concrete historical relationships . Already in '43 the Slavs entire SS divisions armed you ." Well to all these children of the European Nation who fell in the Second World War we believe it should be ideally dedicated *to the last hours of Il'EuroJ›a:* to the point that, as the reporter found , 'That's bad Nazi propaganda followed the Waffen SS *Nordliind* division in the battle of Berlin , iii uld vorn, they are all ahead to fight the enemies of Europe, the hordes of Asia and America.

Those enemies were not identical to each other only in their vision of the world and of life , as Evola had clearly understood : "behind behind the one as well as the other "civilization", behind the one as well as the other greatness, whoever sees it equally recognizes the harbingers of the advent of the "Beast without a Name"»'. They were also so in blind hatred , in leading their ruthless *war rages* on trying to kill the maximum number of civilians , hating Europe for its ancient , beautiful and varied civilisation . _ They saw, rightly, in that Europe that arose in the 1930s the possibility that the old continent would dominate and organize the entire world . They therefore practiced terror as the main instrument of war , looting, devastating, raping, bombing , with the main and fundamental aim of destroying our continent to its foundations . Nor their terrible _

A. Romualdi, Lu *Desirci r la crisi drl nazionalismo,* in *IG., Uny cultarn per l'Euroyy,* Seventh Seal, Rome 1986, p. 55. The original edition of this essay , printed in mimeographed version as a document for the FUAN , is from 1965

1. Evola, *Rivc›ltn coni ro il mondo nu›derno,* Mediterranee, Roma, 1998• (I ed. 19à4), p. 397.

Recently in Germany a book that reconstructs the campaign of indiscriminate Allied bombing of German cities has achieved enormous success , selling over 160,000 copies in the space of a few months . This is J. Friedrich , *Dr.* Brand . *Deutschland im Lt›nil›ynkriyg /* 9V0-i 945, Propyläen, *München* 2002 (the Italian version for Mondadori is in preparation). The author points the finger bluntly at the great war criminal Winston Chur- _ _ _

wrath stopped with *unconditional* surrender . Then the *cxcc* ia began to man, special tribunals were established , the wall of shame was erected over the body of wounded Europe .

Thirty years of fraud

It was almost 10pm on Sunday 12 August 1973: approximately twenty- four hours after the car accident in which he had been involved , Adriano Romualdi died in his bed at the San Camillo hospital in Rome. In less than a year , he would also disappear
his main teacher, Julius Evola: all the culture of the Right
thus, in the rapid space of three seasons, it would have lost its main references . It was from then on that the young people of the Right began to study diate in the library of the cultural orphanage .

It may sound strange, but when he died in August 1973 , Addano Romualdi was only 32 years old. His intellectual work was _
at the beginning, yet he had already produced pages of such clarity and rigor, which could clearly be foreseen as a bulwark for the young woman
mind would have constituted an entire political and spiritual culture ^.
The harshness of his tones, the fearlessness of his logic, the courage of his statements and his brilliant exposition made his prose a masterpiece.

chill, still considered a " national hero " across the Channel. In a recent interview the author stated : "Never has any civil population had such a
destiny. Wonderful cities , built day by day over the course of thousands years , were destroyed overnight . _ This catastrophe was unprecedented . _ In the cities. everything was indiscriminately destroyed" (see A. Lombardo, *"fn Gyrmuyiu sette ibrimiitirdaitietiti is rsployo mtche ilsmsy dicolya"(interview* • *J. Riedrich), "Il* Giornale", 24.4.2003, p. 28).

• See , lastly , what an anti - fascist scholar writes : Fr. Germinario , *Con Evoki. re Evola oils . Europeans.erno, riatiualioa ioor of the nizisnio and new politico-cultural identity of the dystra nr the writings of Adriano Rommeldi* , in C. Adagio — R. Cerrato — S. Urso (eur.), *The long* decade». *The* ft ‹ ifia before *the* 6fi, Cierre Edizioni, Veruna 1999, p. 347 and 349 (pp. 345-372): "Among the studioxi of Italian neo- fascism has *always* had *unanimous* recognition of the decisive theoretical-political role played by Adriano Romualdi in the area of right -wing radicalism "; " Romualdi is almost certainly to be considered the greatest pupil original by Evola, also taking into consideration the fact that his intellectual relationship with the latter was almost never one of slavish subjection or sterile repetitiveness " .

said clearly. A boy who had fate, gods and *h mingja•*
endowed with an extraordinary talent , capable of tackling very different
topics with competence and intellectual rigor , as he is animated by a
burning and unquenchable inner flame : and who, above all, had
employed those extraordinary means for the "good battle" .

Many have asked themselves , over the course of these thirty years,
what else Adriano Romualdi could have done, said, written and promoted :
what further contribution he could have made to the culture of the Right, and
in which directions he would develop his studies . Consequently , what would
this culture have been like with him
of the Right: how much it could have remained true to itself ed
possibly guide public opinion .

The most convincing reflection is the apparently most paradoxical one :
"Adriano Romuuldi was privileged , not only in the anticipatory power of
thought, in the evocative power of style,
in the nobility of soul that was nourished by the roots of an ancient lineage ;
he was privileged by Destiny who on the asphalt strip cut off with the scythe
edge of the sheet metal a life in the splendor of creative maturity , saving her
from the pettiness of compromises ,
from the cowardice of degenerate ideal heirs . The Gods love those who die young

The notion of *haitiingja is* typical of medieval history : it designates the good
They are of *uaa* lineage. *Co51 writes* Mario *ScoveLei* in the article at the *Antiche*
saglie islyndesi uz lui *curate* (Einaudi , Turin 1973 , p .
_ _ _ He will be able to easily discern how the *haminyja*
vc
it is the luck that distinguishes a family, passed down from generation to generation
in generation [...]. The /iamingc benefits the individual as a member of a
lineage particularly favored by destiny".

" See, among the many writings: *in yriitiis P* Romualdi (eur.), *Memory of Hadrian* ,
Edizioni de "L'Itnliano", Rome 1974. See also C Terracciano, *Accensione*
of the *last hours of Europe, " Literary* Diorama" 2 (1976), pp 9-10 ; id., *Adriano*
Romiuildi : aninxi of the revolution. recovery of the soul, "Risguardo" IV (1955),
pp 14-21: G. de Turris, The *"revolu ion con.servatrice by Adriano Romualdi,* "Pa-
gine Libere" 11 - 12 (1993); then in id., *Politically incorrect,* Terziario, Milan
1996, pp l81-186 ; weights again, with slight modifications, in "Algiza" 10 (1998), pp. 19-
21: E. Rolli, *Adriano Romualdi our brother* muggiore, "Orientamenii" 1 (1998),
yp. 53-54; G. Perez, *"Elective units ". Julius Evola and Adriano Romualdi between Po-*
/Mq and *Vieni÷e of the m ndri, " New* Oven" I (1998), pp. 107-1 55-61 ; A Lombardo,
Adria- no Romualdi and the Problem ‹li a European TraJizionr , *"Ital* icum" 3-4 (1999), p.
9, id., £o *sc›Me e la bniiaglia,* "Area" 82(2003), p. 74; S. Arcella, *Memory of Hadrian* ,
"Aren" 59 (2011). A. Piscitelli, L'Ei+ropa *archeofuturisM di Adriano Romualdi , "Axe'a"*
82 (2003), pp. 72-73.

well, the Gods make those they love die young : the Amerouo Gods A‹1riano Romualdi""

That's how it is. At the same time the Gods have given us all — which a unity of feeling and being gathered around the same symbols - a burdensome responsibility , that of taking on the burden that it was also Adriano Romualdi's and to try to carry out, with our limited forces and possibilities , that work of defending positions "lost". The responsibility is enormous. In a letter to a comrade in June 1968 , considering the resulting discouragement from the harshness and difficulties encountered in the political battle , Adriano Romualdi had argued : " we can only escape from perplexity and discouragement through action . What this action should be is indicated to us , day by day, by the needs of the community moment and the demands of the hour, *Vie F‹›rde-rung kes Tnges*, so much to inconvenience Goethe""

The last hours of Europn, *ey•uy«a of the vanquished*

With the work included in *The Last Hours* of *Europe*, a volume published posthumously in 1976, Adriano Romualdi was preparing to to deliver to the press a great epic song of current times :

C. Terracciano, *Adriano Ilomualdi cii.*, p. 15.

A. Lombardo - R. Del Ponte (eur.), *Two letters iiv'dited* by *Adriano Romualdi* , "Algiza" 16 (20(13), p. 7. These are two letters sent to Emilio Carbone of Genew.

" The book was published in 1976 by Edir.ioni Ciarrapico: as can be read in the Preface by Pino Romualdi who wanted to reproduce it in this new edition unchanged, it consists of a collection of essays by his son , part of which was previously completely unpublished and the other (minor) part published in various magazines (mainly "L'Italiano"). It had 190 pages and was literally full of typos and printing errors . However, it is a beautiful volume , with tea cover and a light blue cover , in which I found the cover among other things a rare photograph of the Author. A few years later, namely in 1988, the publisher published a second edition in a few copies , which ran 330 pages: such a significant increase was due exclusively to the inclusion of numerous other images , but the text remained completely unchanged (typos ed _ _ errors *included)*. Apparently this "second edition" (in reality , as mentioned, it is essentially a reprint of the first) very rare and comes today sold at extremely high prices by antique dealers and private individuals .

from the first pages we enter an era in which mythical and eternal figures , such as the warrior , _
the hero, the knight: multi- faceted monsters , unleashed demons, infernal horrors appear before them . As is typical of the soul Germanic, and therefore the most authentically European, in the tragedy of the Second World War , as in the prose of Adriano Romualdi, dominates a tragic vision of heroism, that is, that of the fighter who faces an enemy who has disproportionately greater forces , who knows he is destined to death and defeat , but who nevertheless knows the
his duty and carries it out to the end, until it is cancelled himself in conflict. In this defeat lies the hero's victory , in extreme sacrifice in order to be faithful to one's vision, to the command received, to the vow of loyalty and to one's land.

Furthermore, since it is a purely "political" and partisan work , *The Last Hours of Europe* has the great charm of showing us, raw and real, that figure that Saint -Paulien thus defined : " the soldier who knows how to fight to the end, defending a piece of land or, against all logic, a shred of an idea "". Of course, it doesn't can satisfy lovers of good , progressive and democratic historiography , which moreover accuses "the neo- *fascist* difficulty of doing historiography ""^ or even, tout *court,* states that it is it is impossible to talk about the existence of a "culture" on the Right".

"Perhaps one day we will see that democracy , with its leveling, he laid the foundations of a society where a bourgeois mass would do it from platform to a new aristocracy. Beyond nihilism , it remains one more possibility, an expectation vibrant like the roar of engines . And the values of the slaves, the morality of those who speak out of convenience or fear , who hope in the paradise of the herd or in the pasture happiness of " social justice ", will return to the dust .

'* Saint-Paulien, f *leoni morti,* Volpe, Rome 1967, p. 5.

Fr. Germinario, *The other memory. The Far Right, Salò and the Resistance,* Bol lati Boringhieri, Turin 1999. See also F. *Iesi, Cultura di De.etra,* Milan 1979; Br. Ferraresi (eur.), The *radical de.etra* , Feltrinelli, Milan 1984.

And this is the case of the well-known Italian guru Norberto Bobbio.

A. Romualdi, *NietZsrhe and the egalitarian mythology* , *cit.*, p. 82.

kings from whence they arose"7 . On that day , whether far or near , the value of the fallen in defending Europe from the onslaught of other continents will finally be recognised.

Alberto Lombardo

PREFACE

The publisher Ciarrapico publishes — edited, documented and edited by me illustrated by mostly unpublished photographs — the study of _ _ Adriano Romualdi on the last battle for Europe. Without any undoubtedly one of the most epic and, politically, the most dramatic and important battle of the Second World War . A hopeless , harsh , bloody fight , valiantly supported by the German and Italian forces and in particular - as regards the last days of Berlin — from the volunteer forces of each taken : French, Dutch, Belgians, Danes , Spaniards, that is, by all the young soldiers who, beyond any calculation and any particular interest , had preferred to remain faithful to the end to their choice and to the destiny of the own generation.

The publisher and I believe we have given the reader an important book . historical and political significance entirely worthy of the intellectual seriousness and enthusiasm with which Adriano wrote these pages between 1965 and 1972 . _ _

I dedicate them to the young people of the new generations and to those who, young fighters then, when the fate of the Second War The World Cup was coming to an end, however they had neither the time nor the way to live to the end the drama of this old Europe of ours which was dying in the rubble of Berlin.

The trap•ic sedan in Piazzale Loreto had been consumed for a few days. The old great democracies and communism were allies they had won. The people, it was said, were free. But Europe was finished . Its independence was dead forever .

Preceded by an important introductory note which appeared on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the conflict, this volume takes the

if - as the reader will see - from the third great German offensive against Russia in the summer of 1943. The first, the " Red Beard " operation , which began at dawn on 22 June 1941 - the same day in
which 128 years earlier Napoleon Bonaparte had set out at the head of the ***Grande Armée*** to march on Moscow - had not achieved all his objectives .

Under the orders of Field Marshals von Leeb, von Bock and von Rundstedt 170 German divisions and 30 Ruinian divisions collected in three groups of armies, solidly supported by powerful forces of
heavy weapons and armored vehicles , dropped from the sky by clouds of *Stukas* bombers and fighter -bombers , had literally rushed against the Russian deployment , shattering it in several places , dividing its forces into sections, isolating them, surrounding them, imprisoning them in enormous pockets , gradually eliminated by the main body .
of soldiers who followed and then resumed marching rapidly across the vast spaces of the Russian plain .

In just a few weeks the results achieved were enormous . The Soviets had practically lost two- thirds of their potential .
I war them.

Tens of thousands of kilometers of Russian territory had fallen into the hands of the German armed forces which, now firmly entrenched in front of Leningrad and Moscow in the northern sector , had occupied Karchov and Rostov in the southern sector, and spread into the large
Ukraine.

Nla the main objective had been missed. The Russians, although beaten and shattered, were not defeated. Against all reasonable odds,
the gigantic losses in men and materials had not deprived the Soviet armed forces of the possibility of resisting, nor did they
that of reacting. They would give a surprising demonstration of this shortly thereafter by reoccupying Rostov and thus making people register for
the first time since the beginning of the Second World War one is
albeit a modest defeat of the German armed forces . Strong of
their immense resources and their industrial plants - quickly transferred with a gigantic effort and with incredible rapidity up to and beyond the Urals , in the distant eastern lands , now practically
from every possible attack - the Russian leaders , despite the defeats , the disastrous retreats and often the tragic escapes of their troops , had evidently not lost control of the situation .

situation, nor the ability to exploit the natural advantages that the large operational spaces and the early harsh winter of 1941 had largely offered them .

Stalin had spared neither men, nor weapons, nor materials, sacrificed en masse in the furnace of battle, lit and fueled for months by the overwhelming pressure of the German armies . But Communist Russia had held ; had remained standing waiting for the mud, the snow , the atrocious frost to have slowed down and then the rhythm of the German advance was extinguished . At this point the Russian command was able to organize its counterattack and force the Germans to retreat , albeit partially , to make some adjustments to the front . Prelude to what in a few weeks would be the great winter counteroffensive of the Soviet army . A powerful operation which began on December 5th _

in Moscow with imposing forces and very ambitious plans, had been subsequently fed and conducted with varying success until _ in March.

Having exhausted every offensive possibility , ill- equipped to face the rigors of a heavy winter campaign , lacking any defensive preparation that would allow it to exploit and organize the conquered terrain , the German army had been forced to retreat in the face of the arduous efforts of the Soviets. Hard attacked by Zhukov 's Army along eight hundred kilometers of front from Kalin to Eletz, it had had to clear the front of Fly. A prey that, together with Leningrad , he had not been able to conquer. But perhaps not so much due to the tenacious resistance of the Russians, as much as Hitler, fascinated by the possibility of power quickly proceed to the conquest of the rich Ukraine, he had ordered his generals to head decisively south , reinvLandc _ see you later the attack on the capital and Lenin 's city .

At the end of March, Moscow was more than 150 kilometers away from one side and almost 300 on the other from the new German deployment , whose forces, in those months, had had to fight almost exclusively to defend themselves, to avoid being overwhelmed by the offensive of the Russians. A powerful and surprising offensive that, after struggles bitter trials and very hard- paid successes , it too had finally exhausted itself and extinguished itself .

The initiative was thus able to pass back into German hands.

Once the winter crisis was over , the high command of the Third Reich did they were promptly prepared to resume the offensive: the second since the beginning of the war. The one that should have allowed Germany to reach the final objectives that the winter and the resistance of the Soviet troops had prevented it from reaching the previous year . The offensive to win, as they said, for to always crush all enemy resistance before Allied aid and American intervention made their decisive weight felt on the scales of the conflict . The new winter should have found the deadly match concluded in Germany 's favor with Soviet Russia : and the government of the Third Reich finally in a position to be able to force the Anglo-Americans to negotiate the peace. Or to take on the responsibility and burden of continuing the war against a Germany that , once secure , was behind us and with the wealth of the continent at its disposal Russian, no one could ever win .

Hoping to crush the offensive by preventing it, the Soviets, at the beginning of May, I was suddenly attacked on the salient of **Bere** kovo. Courageous initiative , which however could not prevent the German _ von Kleist 's Army Group in

condition to begin its offensive towards the north , and the Fourth Army of von Paulus from the beginning towards the south the march that, from success to success, he was supposed to take her to Stalingrad within a few months .

With very violent bombings from the air and from the ground and with powerful infantry attacks , the German command had immediately crushed the fierce resistance of the defenders of Sevastopii, eventually falling in German hands after over two hundred days of siege.

Having completed these operations, the moment had now come for the truly great offensive of the 1942 exam , the focal point of which consisted of the so - called Kursk Salie . Objective: to reach the Don to Voroneé, cross the river, interrupt the Volga artery from Astrahan to Stalingrad and proceed as quickly as possible to the occupation of oil wells in the Caucasus.

The first phase was overwhelming . In the course of a week , the Don had been reached on both sides of Voroneé; and the city, despite a fierce defense , fell ten days later , continuing

However, he was unable to use the bulk of the right wing more than expected of the active forces , who thus found it impossible to close the bulk of the Russian armies in a vice . Which - as someone observed with concern - moved away and returned amidst the smoke and dust on the infinite plain . _ _ But Hitler was instead convinced that the Soviet army could not withstand those blows: " Die ***Ru•ssrn*** *siiid fertig",* he said and repeated while walking up and down in his secret headquarters in Vinnitza. The Russians are finished , and in this belief he had ordered the Fourth Army

battleship to head even further south , to form another pocket on the Don, instead of crossing the river at that point and taking it immediately Stalingrad. This task, which he had instead decided to leave to the VI Army alone, supported by the *Panzer Army* of Marshal Hoth which , having crossed the river in the meantime , had occupied Tzimjlskai, while to the north von Kleist had entered Proletarskaia . On 10 August, meanwhile, the bulk of von Pauis ' VI Army had reached Stalingrad, against which , two days earlier,

had launched the first violent attack to take possession of it.

A special corps made up of three divisions of *A§›enj'dger'* and some large Runie units , which were to be joined by three divisions of Italian Alpine troops - later , however , badly employed on the Don — in the meantime he had set off to conquer the oil fields of the Caucasus , naturally protected by an impervious chain of mountains, with passes and roads that are poorly accessible by mechanical vehicles .

A very difficult undertaking even for exceptional troops such as those. Highly trained soldiers who, overcoming every difficulty with enthusiasm , had nevertheless already taken possession of the pass on August 17th . Kluchor at almost three thousand meters high and , on August 21st, they had conquered the summit of Elbruz , immediately after starting to descend along the opposite slope towards the Klirch valley . Through the Santscharo and Almstrican passes other units had reached the Bsjbs valley . _ _ _ _ Sucumi and the Black Sea coast _
they were close. But at this point supply problems arose _ _ difficult to resolve, which had made the march more difficult and slower towards Baku and its oil wells . the difficulties that von Paulus

mountain ppe (lit. *'lperijäger* means "hunters of the Alps ")

and his VI Army they had encountered around Stalingrad had begun to have a heavy impact on everything and everyone . There the great offensive of July, now broken into dozens of streams and having lost its powerful initial momentum , had slowly but inexorably died down .

This is how two months of very hard fighting, maneuvers , of aerial bombardments , were not enough for von Paulus to overcome the desperate resistance of the defenders of Stalingrad .

Stalingrad was no longer a city , but a mass of ruins in the midst of which, street by street, house by house, rubble by brick , hundreds and hundreds of thousands of men fought with *opportunity* and desperation. "My God why have you forgotten us ", writes a lieutenant of the 24th Naitzer‹ fivisirin , "every day that passes Stalingrad transforms into an enormous cloud of blinding smoke and burning; it is a vast furnace illuminated by the reflection of the flames . And when night falls , one of those fiery, terrible, bloody ones nights. the dogs throw themselves into the Volga and desperately swim towards the other side. The nights of Stalingrad cause terror in them . The animals abandon this hell. Even the hardest stones cannot withstand these conditions for a long time ; _ only men resist " . And it was perhaps fatal that right in front of this hell of stones and fire is the story of the Second Conflict World Cup had prepared to take another course . November 19th _ the Soviet command , STAV KA , had put a plan in place to liberate the city.

A plan that had involved a million men, thirteen thousand cannons of various calibers and mortars , a forest of dais ... .*sce - or* " Stalin 's organ pipes ", as the Germans called them this deadly multi - barreled weapon — nine hundred tanks and a thousand planes . A gigantic operation , developed upon a front of approximately 4tD kilometres, and which after five days of fierce *struggle* had already achieved the desired result , that is , permitted to the Soviet armies to suddenly close 22 German divisions in a pincer and immediately begin the battle for _ _ their annihilation . Not even the very daring *Winterstirm* operation attempted by General von Munstein with _ _

Lit. "storm in pouring" [NdC].

13 divisions, whose main force , the group commanded by General Hoth, had not been able to rejoin the encircled forces , around which the army continued to close .
deadly of Zhukov 's armies . A month later, on January 31 , von Paulus and his men had surrendered . The 5th Army did not exist more. Meanwhile , on the middle Don, the German armed forces - and with these, those of the Italian expeditionary force - had suffered other disastrous blows .

But despite the disasters, the great battles of the German army on Russian territory were not over. In the grip of an understandable but nevertheless imprudent euphoria , Stalin and his generals had believed that they now had Hitler 's armies definitively in their hands and could immediately launch a general offensive . _ _ _ On 8 February the Russians had reconquered Kursh; on the 16th, they were entered Karkov and Voroshilovgrad , and a little later Paolograd , thirty kilometers from Niepr . For the Soviet armies everything seemed proceed in the quickest and best way . But unfortunately for them , Field Marshal von Manstein, finally obtained from Hitler the allowed to maneuver at his discretion , no longer defending unsustainable positions upon completion but, if necessary, falling back — both to reduce the width of the fronts and to better concentrate and organize the forces - just a few days later, precisely on the 20th February, was able to launch a first counterattack. 11 27 , pushing forward some powerful armored points , had even managed to reach the Donez once again , causing serious damage . the entire Soviet deployment on the Voronezh front was in danger . A cold and precise maneuver which between 2 and 4 March allowed him to encircle and destroy the Soviet III Armored Army . _ _ _ In a few weeks the situation had almost reversed . Grand part of the land lost in the previous months had been reoccupied: Karkov and Belgorov had once again been torn away from the EU Soviet troops , forced to quickly cross the upper Donez.
However, once again the spring thaw had come to save Stalin and the Soviet High Command from their mistakes ; and with this, General *Fango* , against whom the German maneuver had to inevitably stop .

But von Manstein had thus rebuilt the soul of the army Germanic, and laid the foundations of his third and final offensive.

Let's talk about the so-called "Cittadella" operation — the first that

the book tells — and whose final goal was once again the _
destruction of the Soviet armed forces ; and for this purpose, a new great battle of destruction of the Kursk salient . The point key to the front , in which the Russian High Command had concentrated 40 percent of its entire forces , the elimination of which would have opened the doors of Moscow itself to the Germans ; allowed the reoccupation of the whole of Ukraine and the reopening of the oil route , which had already been attempted and failed the previous year . "The conquest of Kursk should have shone," he had
said Hitler, "like a lighthouse in the fog". In other words , it should have demonstrated to the world that Germany was practically invincible on the battlefield . That no coalition, even if it were now led by Ainerica, could have broken it. Era,
I repeat, what Hitler had been waiting for in vain for some time to be able to negotiate peace with his enemies. The peace that the German people and their _
rulers wanted to quickly achieve a new balance between the powers in Europe and in the world . And in the foreground , peace with England : the great adversary whose soil Hitler had not wanted to invade even when he certainly could have . At least to bring the war home to him. England, with Quaie Hitler , actually wanted to find a plan to collaborate , albeit in a changed framework of balances and prospects . There are those who support — and not 'without important elements of proof - that on 22 June 1941 Hitler had launched his attack on Russia precisely so as not to be tempted to escape from the dangerous immobility and isolation in which his policy in Europe had found itself , after the fall of France , seriously bringing his armies across the Channel to attack England . For Hitler, Europe 's mortal enemy was communism , not English democracy . The spaces that
Hitler considered indispensable to the life and development of the new German state certainly not in England or even in his Empire . They were the lands of the Soviet Empire: Ukraine, the Caucasus. . .

* * * * *

As we know, the "Cittadella" operation was not an operation lucky. Prepared in the utmost secrecy by the High Command of the German Armed Forces under Hitler 's personal orders , it was not

was never secret for the Russians, promptly informed down to the smallest details by the Rote Kaf › elle *spy network,* operated in Switzerland , and in particular by " Lucia" and by a famous spy known by the name of " Werther"; a man evidently nestled in the close ranks of the Hitlerier's most faithful collaborators . Aware of the objectives , plans and forces that would be involved
employed; of the times and ways in which the " Cittadella" operation should have developed , the Soviets had all the necessary time and the widest possibility to organize and arrange how _
the necessary defenses could not have been better put in place to make it fail. Both the fixed ones, i.e. the preparations on the ground, constituted - as the attackers then had the opportunity to see - from an intricate tie.- huge complex of trenches, barriers , walkways, minefields , almost as impregnable as the mobile defences , i.e. the
plans for the location of operational units , connections and those for the timely dosage of the reserves to be transferred to one sector to another. The latter operation makes it easier for me to write from the United States of five hundred thousand particularly powerful and fast trucks , capable of transporting enormous _
contingents of weapons and men a point above the friar.

A situation of absolute privilege, which in addition to having prevented the Russians from suffering the heavy consequences of the element of surprise, had even put them in a position to prevent the attack.
of the offensive with deadly fire actions , with bombers
of destruction and interdiction , fatally destined to upset the attack plans , to force the German command to suddenly change them , creating new and ever more serious operational and command difficulties .

In these conditions the losses , particularly in the first phase of the operation, could only be very high. The first tactical objectives and the first strategic successes of the operation
"Cittadella" were harshly paid in men and equipment.

But nevertheless, also due to the decisive contribution of an original air force used both against the defensive preparations ,
both against **armed** Kurri and self - propelled vehicles , the successes of the former days were incredibly favorable. Position after position was assaulted and conquered with extreme and unparalleled valour _
military expertise , overcoming the resistance of an enemy who, made more

expert and hardened by previous battles and evidently inspired by propaganda that- precisely in view of the long-awaited "Citadel" operation, he had fought well, although he was unable to prevent the attackers, as the days passed, from starting to take the upper hand.

Launched on 14 July with a powerful attack by General Hoth's Fourth Army, with almost 900 tanks in support of large infantry forces, the "Citadel" operation still achieved its main objectives. a week later, I had-

From the north, breaking through the front at Olchowatka, from the south, breaking through that of Obojan , the German forces were now on the verge of closing in a vice the Soviet armies massed by Stalin and his generals in the Kursk salient . The Russians had responded, it is true , with a successful relief action on the Ore1 front, forcing General Model, commander of the IX Army, to transfer part of his troops to that side. But this certainly would not have prevented the continuation and favorable conclusion of the operations on the main front if a completely unforeseeable event had not happened , that is, if Field Marshal von Kluge and the

Field Marshal von Manstein - the one commander in chief of the northern front, and the other of the southern front - had not been suddenly called to report by Hitler, in the "Wolf's Den", to hear the order given by the Fiihrer himself to interrupt the offensive . What had happened? On 10 July the Anglo-Americans landed in Sicily. The Italian armies had not been able to contain them. Convinced - and rightly so , albeit with a fatal timing error - that this operation marked the beginning of the invasion of Europe , Hitler considered it necessary to deal with the new situation by moving forces from the Russian front towards the Italian. Was it really necessary, and above all was it urgent to move these forces? No, according to the opinion of the generals and in particular of von Manstein, who was convinced, despite the many difficulties, that he could successfully conclude the great battle of Kursk within a few weeks.

A battle that even a temporary suspension would have transformed from a probable definitive success into a disastrous defeat, with all the consequences that would have resulted on all fronts . But Hitler - in truth partly comforted by von Kluge 's pessimism regarding a possible rapid conclusion of the offensive on

eastern front - did not consider changing or postponing his fatal decision even for a few days . Operation “Citadel” was over, and with it many other things were over. Kursk, which should have been the lighthouse in the night, the witness to Germany 's invincibility, had instead suddenly become the symbol of a gigantic defeat, in which the German army had burned its last offensive possibilities and its last reserves of men and equipment . Thinking of being able to reconstitute them to resume the attack some time later was simply childish .

From this point of view, the “Cittadella” operation can be considered the truly decisive battle of the Second World War.

Stalingrad had been the first major defeat of the *Wehrmacht* , a defeat that had entailed unprecedented sacrifices and unprecedented difficulties for the entire Eastern Front , but after Stalingrad the Wehrmacht and the other German armed forces had been able to recover. Kursk , however, was the definitive battle .

In Kursk , fate had seriously turned the corner . A definitive turning point , which less than two years later would have brought the Russian and allied armies to the territory of Germany and determined, after a desperate defense city by city, house by house, the German defeat, the collapse of the Third Reich and the death of Hitler.

The only betrayal, that is, the precious information of “Werther” and of the *Rote Kapelle* to Stalin and the STAVKA, although elements of undoubted importance, are not enough to explain all this. Other elements , other evaluations, other decisions, other errors inevitably contributed to determining the new dramatic destiny of the world around the Kursk arch.

The value of the German soldier , his self-sacrifice, his fighting capacity and the undoubted tactical and strategic superiority of his commands, all this stupendous complex of military virtues which at the beginning of the offensive against Russia had been crucial elements of the victorious battles were subsequently no longer sufficient to resolve all the problems on the field and to win the definitive battles.

The terrible experience of the first two years of the war, rather than prostrating them, had made the Russian armies something different and more militarily valid than the unprepared and poorly commanded masses of men who had often allowed themselves to be overwhelmed to the point of fleeing.

The iron will and the hard hand of Stalin and the political commissars had worked the miracle, and instilled in the Russian fighters a different sense of discipline and military virtues.

The enormous numerical superiority in men, weapons, means and the decisive contribution of American aid had made the

what.

* * * * *

Now the siege of Europe had truly begun. The "Second Front" operation — albeit not immediately on the Atlantic coast, where Stalin would have wanted his democratic allies to open it — was practically underway.

The gigantic steamroller of communist Russia and the great allied democracies would never have stopped pitt.

From Sicily, he would meanwhile slowly ascend to Italy immersed in the blood and hatred of its civil war. But an Italy, despite everything, still faithful to itself and to its German allies, obstinate in defending itself , with the sacrifice of its young and old soldiers, with the fascists who had not deserted, who remained to pay the debt towards everyone. the homeland and towards one's own ideas.

Then the long day would come.

The Atlantic Wall stormed by Eisenhower's army; the heroic resistance of the units and the first uncertainties of the High Commands, who were already denouncing the spirit of July 20th : the spirit of the attack against Hitler, the German July 25th . Then the race from east and west towards the heart of Germany, behind the *Wehrniacht* which, desperately fighting, was retreating from all fronts , held beyond the limits of impossibility.

And when everything was about to end, with Europe submerged and its peoples divided and subjugated, the firecrackers of the so- called liberations went off . The Europeans had discovered *resistance.* The initiative and sacrifice of a few had immediately become the business and personal glory of many : of millions *and* millions of opportunists . The race for the winner, the surrender, the cowardice, the false pacts with advancing communism and political anarchy.

But all of Clò would not have prevented and did not prevent millions of men , hundreds of thousands of soldiers from every country, from fully fulfilling their duty to fight, to sacrifice themselves, to die for the

own ideas; to teach everyone that the worst thing about wars is n't losing them, it's losing them badly, in a stupid and cowardly way.

This, perhaps, is the meaning of the book. The lesson and teaching that comes from it for each of us : the spiritual inheritance that the new European generations will one day be able to use to rebuild their political conscience , to conquer their independence and their true freedom from communism.

Pino Romualdi

THE END OF EUROPE

Every year, when April comes to an end and the spring wind dusts the streets, the noisy celebration of April 25th tears us away from our usual thoughts to recall the tragic end of the war to our conscience. The political and spiritual collapse of Italy and Europe. In truth, no occasion is more propitious to allow us to adequately evaluate the moral entity of the catastrophe: the flags in the windows to celebrate a military defeat, the unanimous jubilation of the Russian and American parties which, after so many years , continue to represent the interests of their masters against the European national interest, the apology of massacre and civil hatred.

But, beyond the commemorative hagiography, the dramatic importance of the anniversary remains . Since the war whose end what is celebrated was not only the civil and world war but the historical tragedy that led to the dethronement of Europe and transferred the insignia of command of the territory of our continent to Russia and America. With this tragedy, the decline of the West, prophesied by Spengler in 1917, becomes an overwhelming, evident reality.

There are epochs in history, often concluded in the short space of months or years , which burn from afar with an inextinguishable brightness, as if isolated by a circle of light on the opaque scene of world history . Enclosed by this magical belt of fire, men and events reappear with unreal slowness and richness of detail like the extreme outline of buildings engulfed by a fire that blazes on the horizon on a clear night. These are the eras

and crucial, those in which the angel of history beats with its great wings to the relief or terror of the people and in which, in the space of a few , whirlwind events, the destinies of civilizations are decided .

The Second World War belongs to these eras , marking Europe's extreme struggle against political death and ending with its long , desperate agony. In it every short episode crystallizes in the memory of the centuries, every figure undergoes a heroic stylization, every battle becomes epic and myth.

Europe's agony is long. It begins at dawn on 6 June 1944 when the sea of Normandy suddenly turns black with ships. And an immense and fearful naval army, the largest fleet of all time gathered to overthrow a tide of men and weapons on the defenses of the Western Wall . America, with its intact forces and its powerful industrial potential , hurls hundreds of thousands of soldiers against the bastions of the European motherland . And the historical Nemesis that turns against the old continent, guilty of not having been able to guarantee adequate life chances for millions of its children and of having let them flee across the ocean to fuel the strength of the great materialistic republic *of* the *deracinés* . The struggle rages cruelly on the white coastal strip of the Cotentin peninsula. Every minute, every hour reverberates with fearful explosions and deadly crashes : it is the longest day of the war, as Rommel had called it . The defense was unequal but desperate: "The SS men - as a survivor from the American side recounted - threw themselves on our tanks like wolves on their prey. They forced us to kill them even when we would have been content to take them prisoner." *It* is the decisive moment of the war: if they are thrown back into the sea, if the Westwall defenses hold, the great invasion of the continent could be Americans attempted again in two, three years. In that time everything could change. But the overwhelming superiority of the forces and the total domination of the air decided the fight .

If the thought retraces those events it fixes on some obsessive details that bear the sign of fatality. Thus the failure to use the German counter-espionage report which had identified the slogan of the invasion broadcast in coded language by English broadcasters; thus the absence of Rommel , who was visiting his wife for her birthday . But, two days

before the Normandy landings, another omen had shown itself to signal misfortune and the end for the entire continent: the fall of Rome . Rome, the city that created Western civilisation, was occupied by Allied troops on 4 June . Yet, on the road to Rome, since the distant January in which they had landed in the port of Anzio, the Americans had left behind masses of dead. And on this same front some obscure military events had occurred , small in the general chronicle of the war, but full of significance for the honor of our people: for the first time after 8 September soldiers Italians had fought on the front line against the invasion
vaser.

In April, after the meeting with Hitler in Klessheim, Mussolini had visited the Italian divisions trained in Germany. With indescribable jubilation Mussolini had been greeted by a single cry that rose from the mouths of those twelve thousand men: " To Neptune! To Net-tuno!". Now that first call to fight and sacrifice had found confirmation in the blood. The Barbarigo battalion , together with the volunteers of the Italian SS , had valiantly held the front between Borgo Piave and Lake Fogliano. Of a thousand , less than 400 remained. In Ardea and Pratica di Mare the very young men of Folgore performed prodigies of valour. They too allowed themselves to be killed down to the last man by attacking the enemy tanks with the musket and, if necessary, also with the dagger. Of 980 who went into the line on May 31st, on June 3rd only 30 remained. And these thirty desperate heroes, retreating towards Rome with hearts full of anguish for the disappearance of their comrades, still found the strength to stop , to plant the machine guns, to hurl the last, angry volleys against the enemy.

The collapse of the Atlantic Wall and the occupation of France, completed in early September, constituted the first example of "liberation" in grand style and, consequently, the great dress rehearsal of the new "liberatory " custom ". Europe, which had not yet had the opportunity to familiarize itself with the new political fashion, held its breath in the face of the new horrors, of a purely democratic nature . "Oh freedom, how many crimes are committed in your name!": these words that Madame Roland uttered as she climbed to the guillotine constitute the best commentary on the bloody carnage with which they attempted to destroy all those

Frenchmen who had collaborated with Germany for the creation of a new European order. The victims, according to the official declarations of a post-war French minister, amount to over 105,000. Others, countless, were crammed into prisons full of men and women . The anti-Bolshevik volunteers, who bathed the land of Russia in their blood to defend Europe from communism, suffer the cruel revenge of the red co-partisans who hunt them down, massacre them, torture them. It is an immense tragedy that is a prelude to the one that will spread throughout Europe a few months later.

Among the victims of "freedom" are some of the best French minds: the writers Céline and Chateaubriand, forced into exile, Charles Maurras, who paid for his battle against democratic pharisaism with a life sentence , Drieu La Rochelle, who committed suicide for the inability to survive in a collapsed world, Brasillach, shot in February 1945 after having turned himself in in September of the previous year to have his mother freed. Brasillach had never carried out any real political activity, he had never been a member of any party. But he had put his work as a poet and writer at the service of what he believed to be the cause of European youth. In prison he still wrote his last writings, the lines of Fresnes ' unforgettable poems : "I feel the pain of my country with its burning cities - the suffering inflicted on it by its enemies and its allies - I feel the anguish of my torn country in the body and in the soul - locked in the iron trap of suffering".

Meanwhile, in the torrid summer that saw the liberation of France, the allies moved up the Italian peninsula towards the Gothic Line.
In the North the Social Republic is preparing for the harshest and most desperate struggle. The invasion of national territory and the intensification of communist terrorism require a national mobilization of fighting forces. Party members, aged 18 to 60 , are armed. Thus the Black Brigades were born. The soul of this fierce resistance , of this new Fascism that has rediscovered its spirit

and the audacity of the action teams, is Pavolini. Young, dynamic

co, interested in the problems of culture and a writer himself, Pavolini, who comes from one of the best Florentine families, embodies the desperate energy of the last battle, the will to fight to the bitter end . He is the one who organizes the fascists of Florence for the extreme resistance in the city. In Florence, cleared by the Germans, the fascist snipers resisted for a week. Men, women, children, shoot from the rooftops at the allies and communists . After the end of the war, an American officer, who asked him which Italian city he liked the most, replied: "Florence, because it is the only city where I saw Italians who had the courage to shoot at us". Malaparte dedicated an unforgettable page of *Pelle* to the description of the shooting of Florentine snipers , boys and girls of fifteen or sixteen who died mocking their executioners shouting: “Long live Mussolini !”. It is the only clean and bright page in that darkly dirty and opaque book , the only one in which the Italian name comes out honoured.

But the great, fearful threat looms from the East. Since the tragic days of Stalingrad , Bolshevism has continued its unstoppable march westward. In the summer of '44 it forced the eastern gates of Europe and spread into the Balkans. The betrayal of Romania and Bulgaria allows the Soviets to join forces with Tito and enter Belgrade on 22 October. A few days earlier, on the 15th, while the Russians were forcing the Carpathian passes, Horthy had asked for an armistice. Suddenly the Germans re-establish the situation by forming a government headed by Major Szàlasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross, supporter of the last-ditch resistance against the Soviet hordes that are spreading throughout Hungary, burning, looting, raping.

At the same time, Soviet troops continued their advance in the northern sector of the Eastern Front. In August they occupied Warsaw 's eastern suburb , Praha, separated by the Vistula from the rest of the city. Revolt breaks out in the Polish capital. It will be miserably crushed by the Germans under the impassive gaze of the Russians who, across the river, witness with satisfaction the massacre of the last Polish "bourgeois" forces.

In September and October the tragedy of the Baltic countries took place, reoccupied by the Russians. As many as three hundred thousand refugees follow the retreat

of the German armies while the surviving forces of the *Wehrmacht* they entrench themselves in a pocket in Courland.

The war is now raging on the borders of Germany while German cities burn, night and day, in a continuous fire of bombs . But the will to resist is unshakable. The allies insist on offering unconditional *surrender.* On the other hand, the Russians eloquently clarified their intentions by massacring down to the last woman and child the population of the first German village that fell into their hands . The answer to all this is the VI and V2 , the deadly new weapons that bear the name of revenge *(Vergeltung 1 and* 2) and which fly across the Channel like fiery arrows. Faced with the threat of invasion of the homeland, total mobilization is decreed. Thus was born the *Volkssturm,* the "people's hurricane" in whose ranks old people and young people fight . On October 2 , the Americans arrive in front of the first German city, Aachen. When asked to surrender, the commander of the square replies that "a city where 14 German emperors have been crowned does not surrender without the honor of a fight ". The fight raged for twenty days. In the center of the city the SS sacrificed themselves to the last man to allow the retreat of the defenders and the reconstitution of a front on the Ruhr which would hold for a good 4 months. From the burnt cities, from the streets cluttered with cargo and the wounded , from the deep German forests , the anthem of the young Hitlerites still rises : " The soaked bones of the world tremble - in the face of the great war - but we will continue to march - even when everything around us falls to pieces."

Yet, in the turmoil of the war, the end of 1944 brings a little of relief, a moment of unexpected tranquility, of new hope. The European fortress was invaded but on the Vistula front . on the Siegfried line, on the Gothic line, in Hungary the situation tends to stabilize . The world is covered with a blanket of snow which, like the foggy sky that prevents Allied bombers from flying , seems to spread out to relieve and protect Europe. Days of hope, of euphoria, like the one in which Mussolini speaks in Milan, at the Teatro Lirico, are still possible . At the exit, an indescribable crowd is around him, greeting him with a raised arm, crowding together shouting emphatically "Duce, Duce!". It is Mussolini 's last speech and last triumph . He spoke with moderation and firmness,

he illustrated the achievements of the Republic, he argued with the Germans. The echo is immense throughout Italy which must admit that Fascism managed to overcome the crisis of 1943, that it still has men and *chances,* and that, above all, it can still fascinate young people.

But much more hope comes from the Western Front. One day in December the German army, which everyone considers exhausted and gasping, violently goes on the offensive . The SS emerge from their snowy holes and overwhelm the surprised and unprepared American defenses . It is the Battle of the Bulge, the swan song of the *Wehrmacht.* Objective, inversely, the large Belgian port without which the Americans could not continue the offensive against Germany . It is Hitler's extreme, brilliant move , which attempts to repeat the maneuver of 1940 , the fracture of the enemy front and the sacking of a part of it. For this last, desperate surprise, everything possible and impossible was done . Skorzeny, Mussolini's legendary liberator, passes the lines with soldiers disguised as Americans, changing road signs and creating havoc in the enemy rear. For an instant the sun of victory still shines on the red crossed flag. But it is the last glimmer of a falling star . Soon the overwhelming enemy superiority will restore the balance.

This is how , at the beginning of 1945, the curtain rises on the last one act of European tragedy. Symbolically the first martyr city is Budapest, surrounded on December 24th and besieged until February 20th . The Arrow Cross shed their blood alongside the German soldiers. It is from that blood that the spark of the 1956 revolt will be born. Then it is the turn of the eastern German provinces, reached by the Soviet offensive of 12 January 1945. The Silesian *Gauleiter* Hanke had named the defensive works prepared against the Russians *Unternehmen Barthold,* Operation Barthold, named after the legendary German margrave who stopped the Mongols in Silesia. Now it is truly Genghis Khan's new hordes that are coming forward. War seems to have returned to primordial times, when rape and pillage were the victor 's prize . “Soldiers of the Red Army! – writes the refined Jewish man of letters Ilija Ehrenburg in a propaganda proclamation – take the German women , humiliate their racial pride! There was never any invitation again

fervently taken seriously. Even the little girls are repeatedly raped by ten, twenty soldiers until they bleed to death. In the face of such a brutal enemy, any cowardice, any retreat , is an intolerable crime.

In Italy the Slavic terror rages on the Karst. Soldiers and civilians are tortured, killed and thrown into dark chasms called foibe. Even now that land yields the skeletons of the "executed", one chained to the other with barbed wire, the living next to the dead who dragged their companion into the abyss with their weight. It is to the Social Republic that the pride of having carried out the extreme defense of the Italianness of Venezia Giulia is due. In the last days of collapse, the fascist soldiers headed towards the eastern front to try to save Italy's right in those lands.

We are now at the epilogue. On April 20 , his fifty-sixth birthday, Adolf Hitler made the dramatic decision to remain in Berlin until the end. The posters announce to the population, unaware of his presence in the city, that "the Fiihrer is in Berlin, the Fiihrer will remain in Berlin, the Fiihrer will defend Berlin until his last breath". On the 23rd all the sirens sound: the Russians have penetrated the eastern districts of the city. The last battle begins. The young Hitlerites, in shorts, throw themselves onto enemy tanks . Significant detail: the last defenders of the Reich Chancellery are not Germans but the Norwegians of the SS *Nordland* division and the French of *Charlemagne*. On April 30, Hitler kills himself. The fire breaks out in the courtyard of the Chancellery while the last faithful raise their arms in greeting. The following day Goebbels will follow him with his wife and children . He leaves it written : “I believe that in a moment like this our cause needs examples more than men”.

The hour of its greatest historical tragedy has also come for Italy . The Allies now spread beyond the Gothic Line, opposed in vain by the Republican soldiers on the Senio and the Rhine. The partisan bands can finally descend to the plain to reap the fruits of the others' victory. Blood fruits. The slogan is “Kill the fascist wherever you find him ”. The extermination of the fascists is always legitimized even when it comes to the 120 seventeen-year-old students of the Republican Guard of Oderzo, who surrendered by agreeing to save their lives, or the prisoners of Schio, treacherously killed inside

not prison. It is not a disorderly tumult or anger of the people but a systematic, precise disposition of the communist party which wants to get rid of all the men who can still fight to prevent it from taking power . The last defenders of the Social Republic, surprised by the catastrophe and the betrayal of the German commanders in Italy, who surrendered separately to the allies, were captured, disarmed and shot. In the final chaos, the mirage of the redoubt in Valtellina shines, of the last battle fought among the eternal snows of the Alps. But fate decided the fate of the fascist leaders and the Duce. They share the martyrdom of the obscure 60,000 murdered in this week of passion. “Aim for the chest!”: these were Mussolini 's last words leaked from the official silence imposed by the communist leaders on the material executors of the shooting.

EAST FRONT

After Stalingrad, the German military situation on the Eastern front became one of the most critical. Time works for the Soviets, to whom the Americans deliver ever larger quantities of weapons and vehicles . Nor do they lack cannon fodder : millions and millions of ever-renewing men emerge from the Asian depths of the Soviet empire.

Alongside the Germans, they beat the Finns and, with increasingly shaken morale, the Hungarians and Romanians. Even many hundreds of thousands of Russians , freed from Stalin 's tyranny , are fighting within Hitler 's visions and as *Hiwis, Hilfsfreiwillige*[1] ,
or in the cadres of the *Waffen SS.*

In the summer of '43 Hitler understood that the offensive must be dared again . The passing of time and the shaken morale of the Axis allies force a decision. On the other hand, German war production made formidable efforts. Production of medl and heavy tanks rose from 5,700 in 1942 to 11,900 in 1943, while that of aircraft rose from 14,700 to 25,000 . The cannons and mortars are double those produced in '42, the ammunition triple those of '40 . The formidable *Tiger* and *Panther,* the new Ferdinand self-propelled gun , which came out brand new from the German factories, fuel confidence in a victorious resumption of the war.

The offensive plan has been ready since the Spring. The set date is July 5th . Three thousand German tanks will concentrate

' Support volunteers [NdC].

in the central sector of the Russian front. Two armored wedges, one coming from Orel, the other coming from Belgorod, will close the Soviet salient of Kursk, deeply wedged in the German lines . In this pincer, a million Russian soldiers will be trapped . The Eastern Front will be shattered by a tremendous hammer blow and the Panzer Divisions *will* once again spread across the Volga and Moscow . Hitler said: “the victory of Kursk will be a beacon that will illuminate the world”.

But since the spring, the Soviets have been informed exactly of the day and time of the attack, of the enemy's forces , of the location of his reserves, and of the directions of the offensive. With months of work , they transformed the Kursk salient into an impregnable fortress. All the tanks, all the artillery, all the reserves are deployed where it is known that the Germans will launch the assault.

The Battle of Kursk was decided months in advance by espionage. Communist elements - the famous *Rote Kapelle,* and the spy Rössler, known as "Lucia" - caused the "leak" of information from the General Staff . Through the Chief of the Intelligence Service of the Swiss Army, General Masson, the secrets of the plan reached the Allies.

And, on the fateful July 5th , the Russians already know everything. An hour before the German tanks move , an avalanche of fire falls on them . The Germans understand that the enemy knows. And yet about-
application.

The welcome is tremendous. We advance towards Prochorowka losing 25,000 men and 200 tanks in ten kilometres. But we don't give up. The death ride continues. Another 30 kilometres, tens of thousands more men and 350 tanks destroyed.

And behold, as countless as the waves of the sea, other tanks, Soviet tanks are attacking the German Panzers. 1500 tanks fight against each other in a terrible tangle: it is the greatest tank battle in the history of the world.

In mid- July, the Germans are already stopped. And here it is, how an avalanche, the Russian counteroffensive hits the Orel salient .
The battle rages, terrible. Until, on 4 and 5 *August ,* the Russians reconquered Orel and Belgorod. They invest Kharkov, fiercely defended by the SS. On August 23 , Kharkov also falls. The Germans ha-

half a million soldiers, the backbone of their armored forces and - above all, forever - the initiative on the Eastern front were lost.
Smolensk falls on September 23 . October 24 Dnepropetrovsk .
The Red Army overcomes the Dnieper with momentum and enters Kiev on 6 November .

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On the Eastern front, where the Red Army is pressing with an immense superiority of means provided by the Americans, the *Waffen SS* constitute the living wall of Europe. In November the Soviets recrossed the Dnieper, pressing menacingly towards the west. With this, a great shadow looms over the future of the whole of Eastern Europe. For three years now , Hungarians and Romanians, as well as numerous volunteers from the Baltic countries, have been fighting alongside Germany , knowing full well that Hitler's defeat would mark the advent of Stalin 's tyranny over their countries. The *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen SS* fought with them with volunteers from all European countries .

At the end of January 1944, massive Soviet armored forces managed to surround nine German divisions in a pocket between Cerkassy and Korsun, including the *Wikfng* and the Wallonie Assault Brigade . Their propaganda already announces the "second Stalingrad ", already the triumphant *Pravda* announces "the annihilation of the German militarists and their Belgian, Norwegian and Danish fascist criminals, their friends". The situation of those surrounded, in the heart of winter, with the muddy tracks that swallow up wagons and vehicles,

it is one of the most dramatic. But - under the astonished eyes of the Soviets - the pocket "emigrates" towards the west. The villages that separate from the German lines are conquered by assault . Lucien Lippert falls, commander of the *Wallonie* at only 29 years old - a talented officer who graduated first from the war school in Brussels

and who has been fighting against communism for three years . His soldiers carry his corpse with them on their shoulders. He is succeeded by the prestigious head of the Rex, Leon Degrelle.

The sortie begins on the morning of February 17th. At the last moment, the Soviet armored attacks seem to compromise

put it. The last Wiking tanks consciously *sacrifice* themselves to cover the retreat of the others:

"I saw them just before they threw themselves on the enemy. These young tank drivers were a wonderful sight. They stood on the turrets in their black uniforms decorated with silver and knew full well that they were facing death . Many of them proudly wore the large black-silver Knight 's Cross around their necks , a shining target for the enemy. None of these magnificent soldiers showed any signs of emotion or excitement. They moved with their tracks through the snow with their backs to the retreating troops . None of them came back. Nor a wagon. The order was the order. Their sacrifice was total. To gain an hour of time , which could have saved tens of thousands of soldiers of the *Reich* and Europe, every last German tank driver died on the morning of February 17, 1944 south of Schanderowka".

The bulletin of the 57th Division says, more dryly: "On the morning of 16.2 the Russians attempted to disturb the movements of the 57th and 88th Divisions with their armored forces . The attack is repelled."

At the cost of heavy losses, the breakthrough succeeds. The *Wiking,* with its commander in the lead, wades across the frozen Gniloi Tikic. The men of the *Wallonie follow,* carrying their dead commander in their arms . 34,000 men of the 50,000 who started the sortie are safe .

Hitler personally presents the Oak Leaves with Swords to Gruppenfiihrer *Gille* , commander of *Wiking,* and to Degrelle, wounded five times and seventeen times distinguished in hand - to- hand combat , the Knight's Cross.

On April 2 , *Wallonie* 's men entered Brussels welcomed by a crowd of one hundred thousand people with their arms outstretched in the fascist salute .

At the Sports Palace , an overflowing crowd listens to the speeches role of the Rex boss :

"Today – he proudly proclaims – there is no longer a German who does not know what our people can be capable of, who does not feel bound to them by their common glory, by the wooden crosses raised together .

We are no longer the vanquished.
Our dead are on par .
Our soldiers are also equals.
Will our future also be equal ?"

French newspaper *L'CEuvre* comes out with a title out of five CO- The lonne: *"Degrelle a bien mérite de la Belgique"*.

AND THE LONGEST DAY CAME

Rome has fallen. For the defenders of "Fortress Europe", it is a bad omen, and its meaning does not take long to reveal itself. Two days later, at dawn on the 6th, the Americans landed in Normandy.

Prepared for years, studied in every possible detail, the Allied invasion plan, Operation *Overlord, is triggered.* For months, hundreds of thousands of soldiers have been waiting with weapons at their feet in bases in southern England. For months the most formidable air-naval force in history has been concentrating, together with thousands of tanks, tens of thousands of cannons, vehicles and landing craft.

The Germans have also been waiting for the great assault for months. But the Atlantic Wall is far from being completed: the necessary manpower was diverted from the air offensive on the *Reich* due to the serious damage to industry. Only on the Pas-de - Calais can it be considered perfect, and the high command in fact expects an invasion in this sector. But in Normandy the defensive preparations leave much to be desired.

Added to this is the diversity of opinions of the German commanders: von Rundstedt fears the "Maginot complex", does not believe in the Atlantic Wall and wants to place the armored forces inside to encircle the enemy when he has landed; Rommel has no illusions , he knows that if the Allies land they will never leave and he said that " the front line must be that of high water " . He also said : “When they land, we have to throw them back into the sea the same day. That, for Germany , will be the longest day of the war."

And here comes "the longest day ", D *-day.* But the Germans don't expect it : the sea is stormy , the wind blows cold on the waves of the English Channel. It is said: "at this time they will not come ". Furthermore , Rommel is in Germany for his wife 's birthday . The telegraph operators pick up the invasion signal broadcast by the BBC for the French resistance, and the secret of which the counter -espionage managed to get hold of. They are Verlaine 's verses : *"Les* ***sa•8!Ots*** *longs — des violons de l'automne — blessent mon cmur — cl'une la•8ueur monotone".* Some units stand alert .

But at von Rundstedt 's headquarters there is scepticism: " General Eisenhower - it is said - certainly does not announce the invasion on the radio ".

But here, shortly after midnight , enemy paratroopers launch themselves into the coastal area west of Carentan and in front of Caen, at the two ends of the arc where the invasion fleet will land .

The wind disperses them, many of them perish or fall into the hands of the Germans. But enough remain to attack the sentries in the dark , or take bridges, batteries and positions necessary to support the landing .

While during the night the uncertain news spreads from Normandy to Paris , and from Paris to Berchtesgaden, of 6,480 transport ships, with approximately 4,000 landing craft , escorted by 6 battleships , 23 cruisers, 122 destroyers, 360 torpedo boats and a few hundred tool ships , 13,000 airplanes come behind, with their cargo of death and destruction.

Between Normandy and Paris, between Paris and Berchtesgaden - where Hitler , who has just gone to bed, is sleeping soundly - the telegraph wire brings the first alarming reports. *"Sie kommen!",* "They're coming!", alarmed voices repeat to each other , *"Invasion!", "Invasion !".*

At dawn in June, the immense fleet appears before the eyes of the astonished defenders of the Norman coast:

A strange silence reigned all around. The curtain of fog over the sea was torn. Frerking went outside to have breakfast, but first wanted to look through the telescope. He leaned against the wall of the *Bunker.* "People," he only said , "people, I'm here!"

What he saw, all the officers and soldiers saw at that moment .

data from the beach 's strongholds and resistance nests . And everyone burst into the same cry of terror and amazement: "The fleet!"... Ships large and small, with towers , superstructures, chimneys, antennas, and those grotesque barrage balloons . Like a mysterious city in the gray of dawn, bathed in growing light, an unreal city, a golden, shining city ".

Before the defenders of the Atlantic Wall can recover from their stupor, thousands of bombers glide overhead , dropping 12,000 tons of bombs, as many as were dropped in all of 1943 on the most bombed city in Germany, Hamburg.

The trenches are leveled. The minefields blow up . The *Bunkers* tremble to their foundations. All around, men, vehicles , cannons are sucked into an unlikely vortex of fire . The Germans have 13,000 airplanes over their heads, enough to crumble the positions, to drill the roads , to chase down the reinforcement divisions arriving from the interior. Against them the *Luftwaffe can* deploy just 319 planes .

Even before the first American soldier sets foot on the beach, the Germans have already lost the Battle of Normandy from the start .

But they don't know it . From the torn trenches, from the shattered *bunkers,* those who are still alive fire on the *marines* who come forward in the high water. The machine guns crackle , the pieces thunder in position.

On the " Utah" beach , in front of Saint Maire Eglise , Marcouf 's battery resisted the attacks for 5 days, not hesitating to call on German fire to divert the attackers . On the "Omaha" beach , 6 kilometers long , 3,000 Americans, one every two meters, lie miserably stretched out a few hours after the invasion.
The newly landed British have to face the attacks of the *2nd* Panzer Division .

But this is the only armored formation in front of the landing heads . The Armored Training Division, the *Panzerlehr,* is 150 kilometers south of Caen and will take more than two days to reach the front, followed step by step by bombers hitting men and tanks. The 12th SS *Hitlerjugend* Armored Division drags itself at eight kilometers per hour towards the landing areas , even

which is furiously targeted by the sky. Around midnight he reaches Evrecy to get petrol. But the bombers arrived first : the depots are on fire. Now we understand that Rommel was right when he said: "On the day of the invasion, it will be more useful to have a single armored division on the coast at the moment of the landing than three divisions two days later". But it's too late now.

The **Hitler Youth** ***division on the counterattack***

Finally, the Hitler Youth Division arrives in Caen. *Gruppenfillrer* Witt 's order is peremptory: "The Division attacks the enemy who landed together with the 21st Armored Division and drives him back into the sea". Kurt Meyer, the legendary "Panzermeyer", harangues his men in his energetic way: the *Hitler Youth* Division is the cream of the Hitler Youth, the Hitler Youth is not afraid of anyone in the world, least of all the English. British
— says Meyer — they are "little fish" and will be thrown into the sea.

Operations begin. The enemy vanguards attempting to seize the Carpiquet airport are swept away . Twenty-eight tanks catch fire under the fire of Meyer's *Panzergrenadiere* . 11 day 8 they attack, Putot is reoccupied, they march on Bretteville 1'Or-gouilleuse. Meyer himself leads the charge on the back of a *tiger:* the *Regine Rifies* are overwhelmed.

But then all hell breaks loose from the sky, enemy fighters attack the *Panzergrenadiere* like a swarm of wasps. Meyer , who sees the fields covered with the bodies of his boys, has no choice but to order a retreat.

11 day 9 also the *Panzerlellr!* attacks from Tilly to reconquer Bayeux. It reaches up to 5 kilometers from the city. Prince Schönburg-Waldenburg falls at the head of his *Panthers.* But now the enemy's superiority is a threat behind them and forces them to turn back.

Day 10 finally seems like the day of the long-awaited offensive co-

Motorized infantry. On the topic, see the provocative D. Ciampini, *Panzergrenadiere. new Italian invention?,* «RID» 7 (2000), pp. 83-87.

German breed. The commander of *Panzergruppe West,* Geyr von Schweppenburg, gathered his general staff in a clearing in the forest for the decisive plan. But enemy fighters swoop down from above and wreak havoc. The offensive was decapitated before it began.
Countless other officers will fall under enemy bombs : General Marcks, commander of the 84th Army Corps , *Grup-I**•fiil1rer* Witte, commander of the 12th SS Division, and even Rommel will be machine-gunned by an enemy fighter on July 17.

Protected by the aerial umbrella, in a few days the Allies managed to land 100,000 men on the Norman beaches. The Germans are forced on the defensive. Their reinforcements arrive with shocking slowness.

The 2nd SS Division *Das Reich* slowly dragged itself from Toulouse to Saint-Lo for two whole weeks, in the chaos of the railway lines destroyed by the bombings, opening its way through an area infested by the *maquis.* The partisans came out of their shelters everywhere , sabotaged the marching German troops, massacred small isolated garrisons . Some officers lose their temper and this leads to ruthless reprisals such as the destruction of the village of Orad by elements of the *Das Reich division.*

The *Leibstandarte AdolfHitler,* returning from the Russian front , is recalled from Belgium . Two other SS armored divisions are recalled from the Russian front , the 9th *Hohenstauen and* the 10th *Frundsberg.* They arrive in Nancy on 12 June, when the Allies have landed only one armored division , but along the destroyed communications routes they will only reach Normandy on 1 July, and will now find five of them.

The English attempt to take Caen, desperately defended by the Hitler Youth Division .

The vanguards of the British 7th Armored Division, Montgomery 's " desert rats", slip through a breach opened from Caumont to Villers-Bocage. But a solitary *"I"igre* emerges from the woods . Michel Wittmann commands it . Not yet thirty years old, he has already destroyed 119 tanks on the Russian front and wears the Knight's Cross with Oak Branches. Tigre 's 88 thunders, Wittmann runs along the flank of the British column and hits one

2 This is the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, where the reprisal was carried out born in July.

one vehicles . Within minutes, the road is hell. In panic , the British 7th Armored Division turns around. Tilly's forehead will still resist for weeks.

But, on the Cotentin peninsula, the Americans overwhelmed the weak German forces. On 18 June the peninsula was cut off at the base and six American divisions headed for Cherbourg, defended by a single German division.

Cherbourg resists tenaciously until June 25th . Strong individuals hold out until the 30th . The defenders fall into the hands of the Americans, but not the port facilities, which they systematically destroyed, in what the Allies will define as "the most total, scientific and systematic operation" . of destruction of the history of the world."

At the other end of the landing front , Marshal Montgomery's ambitious plans repeatedly collide against German resistance on the Caen front .

The Canadians cross the Odon, clogged with corpses, gain altitude 112 , threaten to break through to the south-west of the city. Hausser's armored troops , ready for the counterattack, are pinned down
from a terrible bombing. But *Gruppenfiihrer* Brittich implacably orders : "Resume 112". The *Tigers* laboriously climb to the summit, the British offensive is blunted. But, in the following days, the fight continues. Hitler ordered: "Caen be defended to the last man," and the tough *Grenadiers* of the *Hitler Youth* Division took this literally. They fight at the airport, around the Ardenne convent , with bladed weapons, with pickaxes, with rifle butts. On 9 July the British finally entered Caen , more than a month after what had been foreseen in the plans of Operation *Overlord.* But the Germans still resist beyond the Orne , in the southern and eastern suburbs of the city.

The war in the hedgerows

Meanwhile, along the front that goes from the base of Cotentin to Caen, the war of position has developed . The Norman *bocage* , the landscape of small fields surrounded by walls and hedges , offers natural defenses for anti-tank warfare .

The Americans advance cautiously. Every hedge is a nest of machine guns, every embankment a post, every bush a *Tiger* ma-

shielded ready to open fire . On July 3, the US VII Corps attacked south towards Coutances but suffered as many as 5,000 casualties in progressing 6 kilometers to La Hayedi : -Puits . There are almost a thousand deaths per kilometre: one death per metre ; a high blood price .

We advance further, towards Lessay. The Panzerlehr boys offered fierce resistance to the Americans . Another 5 kilometres , another 5,000 deaths.

The Americans have an overwhelming superiority of means, but the Germans contrast them with ingenuity, tenacity, courage. "The Te-tleschi – recalls an American officer – did n't have much left, but they knew damn well how to use it". The VII Cor-
; The American army tries to open a passage from Carentan towards Périers: on the first day it loses 1,400 men to gain 200 meters and 6 German prisoners.

The second improves a little: 1500 meters and 750 deaths. Both American divisions lose 8,000 men in 11 days. Their generals are admired by the German resistance: "The Germans resist only thanks to the courage of their soldiers . We outnumber them ten to one in the infantry, fifty to one in the artillery and, as for the air force, you ca n't even make a comparison."

We continue to advance towards Saint-Lo, fiercely defended by paratroopers , by the *Panzerlehr,* by the bloody sections of what had been some of the best German divisions . Finally, at the cost of another 6,000 deaths, Saint-Lo is taken. Twelve Allied divisions suffered 40,000 casualties in 17 days to advance the front
of 11 kilometers. "We won the battle – a survivor would later say – but if we consider the high cost of human lives
' we Americans lost it '.

Meanwhile, on the Caen front , Montgomery returns to the offensive.

At dawn on July 18, three air fleets and 2,000 bombers razed the area south -east of the city to nothing . The German positions are pulverized ; the trenches buried, the cannons shattered , the machine gun nests flattened. In this no man 's land , in this lunar landscape of craters from which sparse German infantrymen emerge here and there, stunned, the British armored divisions advance . The defenses in the southern part of Caen are overwhelmed. The English proceed undisturbed for about ten kilometres . Nothing seems to be able to stop them now.

But the enemy pressure on Caen concentrated the best German forces in that sector. At the other end of the front, where German troops have been subjected to daily assaults in impossible conditions for a month , catastrophe looms .

On July 25 , more than 2,000 bombers descended like a cloud of locusts on the positions held by the Armored Training Division , the *Panzerlehr*. 2000 bombers in an area measuring seven by three kilometres : each of them has to plow a space of three and a half metres, causing death.

Bayerlein's field telephones search in vain for the front line; the front no longer exists. In the breach, the Americans begin to pass through. But not entirely. Individual groups still fight . Those who escaped are still having a hard time. But the end of any organized resistance now appears to be a matter of hours; after which the American armored divisions will spread out of Normandy.

On July 26 , a senior officer shows up at the Bayerlein command post :

"The lieutenant colonel in his impeccable uniform with the red-crimson stripes on the trousers is somewhat embarrassed in front of the general and his officers who have not shaved for several days, have not eaten a hot meal...

"Mr General – he says – Field Marshal von Kluge demands that the line from Saint-Lo to Périers be held".

Silence. Kaufmann looks at Bayerlein. Major Wrede looked from outside the window.

"The line from Saint-Lo to Périers must be maintained," repeats Bayerlein . "May I ask with what?".

The lieutenant colonel pretends not to hear the question: "This is the order I bring you , Mr. General," he replies. "You must hold the line, no one must abandon their positions...".

Bayerlein stares at the officer. An awkward silence spreads in the room. Outside, a stable door can be heard slamming ...

The general feels the blood rush to his temples...

He leans against the table and speaks softly, but the words come out hard, like boulders:

"There, in front of us, everything holds, Mr. Lieutenant Colonel, everything. My grenadiers, my sappers, my tank drivers, all hold back .

ro. Nobody abandons their positions, nobody. They are in their holes , calm and silent, because they are dead. Dead, you understand?".
Then Bayerlein approaches the lieutenant colonel: "Tell the field marshal that the Armored Training Division is destroyed . All that matters now are the dead . But I won't leave here if that 's the order."

The officer carrying the message may not even respond.
A terrible explosion shakes the house. The earth is shaken. An immense tongue of fire rises up to the sky. Doors fly off their hinges. The windows are shattered. The large ammunition depot near Dangy was hit by fighter - bombers and blew up . Thousands of rockets roar and sweep across the region, leaving behind them a darting fiery tail."

In the void created in front of their lines, the Americans spread
gan outside Normandy.
On August 1st Avranches is in their hands. From the breach, using a single bridge, Patton brings his armored forces through
in Brittany. The German air force tried to destroy the bridge in vain . In three days 100,000 Americans, with 15,000 vehicles, roam the streets of Brittany.

"Go on, go on": the Patton tanks advance without caring about their own flanks. Only the goal matters.
Rennes is reached on the 4th , Vannes on the 5th, Nantes on the 6th and Brest it is under siege. Hitler is furious against this *"cowboy* who, using a single bridge, makes an army take a walk in Brittany". Von Kluge proposes retreat behind the Seine. But the Fiihrer has a different opinion . He orders a counterattack to retake Avranches and cut off the Americans spreading into Brittany from their bases in Normandy.

On the night of the 7th, four armored divisions, the 2nd under the command of General von Luttwitz, the 116th under the command of Count Schwerin , part of the 1st SS *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* under the command of *Brigadefiihre€* Wisch, the 2nd SS *Das Reich,* without preparing artillery fire , so as not to alarm the adversary, fell on the American lines.

Mortain is reconquered by assault, they advance hastily towards Avranches which is there ahead , within reach. But here is the dawn.

Brigadier General [NdC].

The sky is clear, a splendid summer sky, ideal weather for enemy aviation .

Allied fighter -bombers target German forces in the narrow corridor of the advance. The German infantrymen are forced into ditches, into their holes, in the thick of the scrub. We curse at the sky : “If they don't fly , what are we doing here ?”. “Those ” are the *Luftwaffe* pilots who had promised to send 300 airplanes to support the offensive. 1,300 fighters actually took off from their bases near Paris, but the Allied air force immediately intercepted them . Not one of them will reach the Normandy sky.

In twenty-four hours, the outcome of the counteroffensive is already confirmed put in order.

At the same time, the British armored divisions launched the third , powerful blow south of Caen . On the evening of August 7 , Montgomery went on the attack with as many as 600 tanks : " Operation *TotaliZe",* it was a question of totalizing what the two previous offensives had failed to capture . The bombers sweep the shattered German lines and, as dawn rises on August 8, 6 powerful columns of tanks, four by four, are slowly advancing across the terrain devastated by the bombs.

“Panzermeyer” watches them with binoculars as they advance. “If they come forward,” he says, “it's over for us.” Promptly, he throws the last 50 tanks of the Hitler Youth Division into the counterattack .
Allied planes glide angrily over him; but it's late, the *Pan-zers* have already left.

The *Tigers* advance into the heart of the enemy offensive area.
At the head of them, Michel Wittmann, the intrepid tank destroyer from Villers-Bocage. The English are caught off guard. Once again , the German front holds. The front: an ambitious expression to designate those poor, tortured kilometers where the shreds of what were the best German divisions

they seek escape. But he drove an iron wedge into his chest _
of the enemy advance . Canadians are wasting time. The German lines are strengthened.

In the evening, Meyer's tanks return to their positions in the Quesnay woods . Michel Wittmann is no longer with them. He fell, after destroying his one hundred and thirtyth chariot . But the armored forces of1

Marshal Montgomery were stopped 12 kilometers before Falaise . For the third time, the British offensive is over. However, it is now too late for us to rejoice. On August 8th the Americans took Le Mans, on the 10th they turned north towards Glencon , which fell into their hands on the 12th . The German front in Normandy is now nothing more than a salient surrounded on all sides by Allied forces and dangerously extended towards the west.

The English, coming from Caen, and the Americans, coming up from Alencon-Argentan, could cut it in two at any moment . The retreat begins. The enemy tries to close the exit routes . The Canadians storm Falaise . But in front of Falaise there are the last 500 men and the last 15 tanks of the 12th SS *Hitlerjugend.* For three days, 60 "Panzermeyer" boys barricaded themselves in the Falaise high school . Only 4 of them will fall into your hand alive

to the Allies.

On the 20th, 100,000 Germans, with the remains of the best armored troops te, are imprisoned in the Flers-Falaise-Argentan triangle.

The desperate battle for the sortie begins . With weapons in _ fist, fighting with white weapons , at night, in small groups, they force the enemy lines. *GruppenfiihreP* Hausser passes by , eye patch , machine gun in hand. General Meindl of the paratroopers passes by , with about twenty of his men. " Panzermeyer" passes by , his head bandaged, pistol in hand, alongside the faithful Cossack Michel from Dnepropetrovsk who never loses sight of him . 50,000 pass by

men.

Another 50,000, including 10,000 deaths , remain in the pocket. But the Allied hope of a second Stalingrad is frustrated. There is no mass capitulation . Of the 15 division commanders , only three fall into Allied hands .

The Battle of Normandy is over. Since June 6th , the Germans have lost 400,000 men, 1,300 tanks, 20,000 vehicles, several thousand cannons. The Western Front is annihilated. The remains of the
the fighting divisions retreat with difficulty towards Germany .

On August 25 , the Allies enter Paris. September 3rd in Brussels . _ September 4th in Antwerp . Meanwhile, the Allied forces landed in

4 General of Division [NdC].

Provence on August 15th they go up the Rhone valley . On the 27th I am in Marseille, on 3 September in Lyon, on the 8th in Besançon. Von Kluge, accused by Hitler of having caused the catastrophe on the Western Front , killed himself after having addressed a noble letter to the *Fiihrer* . "I am going ," he writes , " where the majority of my comrades are now ."

The tragedy of Army Group B is over.

MY COUNTRY HURT ME

The German fight on the Normandy front sent Paris into turmoil . _ 11 August 16 - the Americans are in Chartres - the police take off their uniforms. On the 19th - the Allies have already crossed the Seine - the clandestine organizations come out into the open and occupy the prefecture. General von Choltitz - commander of the square - has only 5000 men at his disposal. Signs an agreement according to which German troops remain to garrison the city without engaging in combat with the resistance. And that 's all: no "Is Paris burning ?" and other cinematic fantasies .

On the evening of 24 August the first Allied units reached the French capital . 11 25 parade in the center of Paris. Von Choltitz surrenders after symbolic resistance. But at the Palais Bourbon, at the Bois de Boulogne, in the Luxembourg Gardens , some armored units defend themselves until the next day.

The snipers will continue to shoot from the rooftops. Even when De Gaulle entered Notre-Dame, he shot himself from above, and the crowd had to throw themselves to the ground.

* * * * *

In Paris Drieu La Rochelle followed the developments of the battle in Normandy with the other collaborators . But a state of mind of calm fatalism , of detached curiosity now isolates him from his comrades. At the end of '42 he returned to Doriot 's party , which he had left in 1939.

"I wanted to give my friends – he will write – a concrete pretext

to kill me." He also writes: "In an era in which France and Europe suffer such great dangers and suffering, the intellectual who wants to some extent to remain a man must expose himself not indirectly, but directly to anger and hate".

On 8 June, two days after the Allied landing, he wrote in his diary: "Yesterday I watched the young SS men parade along the Champs-Elysées on their tanks . I have always loved this blonde breed to which I myself belong, but the English, Americans and Russians also belong to it ." He also notes: "If I hadn't already been too old to leave my books , I would have had to join the SS" but "Just as the captain dies on board, so the writer dies in his ivory tower " .

As the end approaches , his hopes get ever closer to death : "I hope to be able to find a death in accordance with my always dream , a death worthy of the reactionary and revolutionary that I am".

On August 12 - Patton 's wagons are already racing towards Paris - he meets a friend on the Place des Invalides. To his question, "what do you intend to do now?", "I'm leaving – he replies – but, be reassured, this time I'm really leaving".

In a farewell letter, he explains the reasons for suicide: I could have taken refuge in Spain , in Switzerland. But no... I don't want to deny anything, I don't want to hide, I don't want to escape to Germany and I don't even want to be touched by dirty paws".

The tragedy of Europe crushes him : "Poor Europe, you are falling apart , dragged by the four winds of your disaster. Asian wind, Slavic wind , Jewish wind , American wind. And you don't notice . "

He writes his political testament: "Yes - I am not just any patriot , a nationalist with blinders. I'm not a Frenchman, but A european.

You are too , consciously or unconsciously. But we played, and I lost . I demand death."

In the evening, he hears German soldiers passing by singing under his house . He writes again: "How I would like to die at the front — it doesn't matter which side, in a Scottish or an SS regiment . " The two warrior *elites* of Nordic Europe, sisters and rivals.

On August 12th he takes a final walk in the Tuilleries gardens to "immerse himself for the last time in the ignoble human crowd ":

"I had two meetings. In the central avenue of the Tuilleries I crossed paths a young man. I didn't know who he was, but I realized that he knew me , and, looking at the type of woman who was walking with him, I understood that he was one of the "resistance". I enjoyed observing his attitude for a few seconds : he had stiffened to show me that he was an "enemy". But this stiffening of his , this effort of his simply made me smile. By now I could no longer see any reality in human feelings. A little later, on Boulevard Saint-Germain, I met a collaborationist priest who started talking to me , angry against " our enemies": this counter-I could no longer even try bothered me a lot, so much so that I couldn't even smile . I returned home without making any effort to detach beings. " myself from things and

That same evening, he takes a fatal dose of barbiturates.

* * * * *

While the German troops fought a retreat, the streets of France, full of dust and sun , are filled with angry crowds-
the.

The resistance comes out into the open, unleashing a whole series of revenge and reprisals against collaborators or presumed collaborators .

It is a great bloodbath, the likes of which France has not seen since '93. And the massacre, systematically carried out by the communists, of all those who - in one way or another - could be an obstacle to their seizure of power. In those areas where the communists remain masters of the camp, the bloody purge is not only directed at the "collaborationists", but at all those - priests, landowners , industrialists, right-wing sympathizers - who are not acceptable to the
P.C.F.

According to the declarations of a French Minister of the Interior, approximately 105,000 were the victims of the purge, a figure which contrasts well with that of the 1,850 shot during the German occupation.

People kill and torture , plunder and torture. The chronicles of the "liberation" are filled with the names of picturesque leaders and gangs and blood. There are the “lynxes of Tarbes”, the “liberators of He-rault”, the “partisans of Lozére”, the “torturers of Castel Porteau”, the “Álbert gang”, the “il Terror” group. There is the communist Antoine Jacquetant known as “the monster of Saint-Irenée” who kills and beheads a nine-year-old child ; there are “Captain Marx”, the “ patriots of the Ardéche”, the “avengers of the Côte-du-Nord”, the “bandits of Senones”, the “executioners of Palay”, the “murderers of Puyrucard”, “the man of 32 crimes”, the “slaughterers of the Vosges”.

These groups took advantage of the chaos created during the Allied advance to establish a reign of terror.

It is August 1944. In every city there are a concentration camp and a torture chamber under the orders of the communist Willard, Minister of Justice, and of the police prefect Airaud known as "the eye of Moscow".

Rapes, beatings, mutilations and all kinds of abuses are the order of the day. In Nancy, the partisans put a pregnant woman against the wall twenty times in a row until she miscarries fear . In Verdun-sur-Tarne, three sisters are killed after being whipped naked in the town square . Close to Reims a girl is tortured and raped under the eyes of her father who goes mad. In the Pyrénées - Orientales department , the parish priest of Mosset is hanged naked in the village, the parish priest of Totavel killed in atrocious suffering. The killers of the two priests are decorated as "heroes of the resistance".

In Grand Bonnard, the boys from the Militia Cadre School are shot five by five. In Paris, the cellars are crammed with "in-civics", and the partisans unload their revolvers into the pile. In Marseille , before killing a police commissioner , the liberators tore out his eye, cut out his tongue and burned his sexual parts . In Lyon a girl is immersed 17 times in water electrified by an electrical socket; the girl goes crazy.

In Saint-Bonnet-de-Joux, Doctor Nourrisat, who had saved 50 hostages taken by the Germans from being shot, was shot as a " traitor"; in Chambery political prisoners are lynched; in Marseille, “commander Gonzales” makes the prisoners dance underneath

to the whip up to the neck. It's a long, monotonous series of horrors of-French Revolution .

* * * * *

Maurice Bardéche wrote in his letter to François Mauriac: "There were those who boasted of having "liquidated" a bride, the day of her wedding, on the poor threshold of a church, in the white dress . This happened in Limoges. Others said they had fought in Savoy. They had land. But crucified a man to "unfortunately, a mistake had been made ", because the man was Swiss . However, no mistake had been made with companion, the whose eyes had been gouged out: that was his allowed to agree to be part of the firing squad that grace to Pacese. Another, a seventeen-year-old, was was to shoot his two brothers. Elsewhere, the husband was killed, the wife was first raped , and finally a child aged between eleven and ten was killed to prevent him from speaking. Entire families were like this suppressed. A man with whom I was in prison in Drancy, had been tied to the bed and forced to assist his while he was raping her daughter twelve times in front of him...".

Once the conflict is over , when the Cold War opposes him American assistance to the Russians, the "democrats", who in 1944 had faced the horrors of liberation in silence , will find the courage again to speak.

Thus Donald Robinson, American correspondent of the Seventh Army, who wrote in *The American Mercury:* "I witnessed the communist terror that reigned in southern France after the German retreat. Intelligence officials estimate the number of victims at 50,000 ... From summer to autumn 1944 the communist revolt almost overwhelmed the South and the mere presence of US troops put a brake on this revolution... From Tolo - you know in Nice there was terror ...".

Thus a Gaullist deputy, in the newspaper *Le Citoyen Libre,* in 1946 asked the communist newspaper *The Worker,* which had written "the resistance has clean hands":

" Those heroes who, at the Liberation , killed

did they use a farmer to steal some gold from him?... Did those who stole ten million jewels from Madame Chabei have clean hands ?

Those who brought poor Abbot Daunis to the Frigate castle had clean hands , tortured him, made him walk
on glass bottles, tore out his eyes and tongue and hung him by his feet until he died after two days of horrible suffering ? Did those who murdered Léger de Fumet have clean hands because he refused to undertake, at the cost of his life, never to hinder the communist party? The son perhaps does not know the names of those who murdered his father. I know them."

Honest admissions, but they will only come after the war is over. In '44, all the "resisters" were still "patriots", and the strictest silence prevailed between Gaullists and communists .

The prisons are filling up. Brasillach is also arrested. In mid -August he hid in a rented room. During the clashes in Paris, partisans looking for snipers almost entered his room . The doorman stops them: "There 's a good young man up there , aren't you going to bother him?".

But in September, he learned that his mother had been arrested and he turned himself in to have her released.

In prison, he will write the *Poems of Frésnes:*

My country hurt me with all its exiles
By its overcrowded dungeons , by its lost children, Its prisoners
parked between the barbed wire,
And all those who are far away and whom we no longer know.

My country has hurt me with its burning cities,
Evil under his enemies and evil under his allies
My country hurt me in body and soul,
Under the iron shackles to which he was bound

My country has hurt me with its crested pits , with its
rifles raised on the shoulders of the brothers,
And by those who counted in their despised hands The price of
queens at the highest *salary .*

My country has hurt me *by its slave fables, By its dirty men*
of yesterday and by those of today , My country has hurt me by
the blood that washes *it ,*
My break hurt me . When will he be cured?'

He still writes the *Letter to a soldier of the class of 1940* in which deplores "the dejection of a great nation forced to choose between Coblenz and the Jacobins".

Chénier writes , in which he recalls the figure of the beheading poet- from the French Revolution :

A century and a half has passed.
The season is even less certain, Here
is the time of André Chénier.
On the closed *and full prison*
Another world has disappeared .
0 black sun of *our pain,*
Another crowd is in the street .
Like in the old week Always asking for
someone to kill

On the back of some rampart,
Deep in *the depths of our cities,*
Near the walls erected somewhere ,
The rifles of the mobile guards

My country hurts me for all its exiles, / For its overfilled prisons , for its young dead, / For its prisoners crowded behind barbed wire , / And all those who are far away or missing . / My country hurts me with its cities in flames, / Bad against enemies and bad with allies , / My country hurts me in body and soul, / Under the heavy irons from which it's tied. / My country hurts me with its dug graves , / With its rifles aimed at the backs of the brothers, / And for those who count among the gods of renegades price knows . / 11 my rather than a fairer reward despicable , / The country hurts me due to the falsity of slaves, / With its executioners of yesterday and those of today / It hurts me with the blood that flows , / 11 my country hurts me . When will he be able to heal?". These are paragraphs 4, 5, 7 and 8 of *Mon pays m'a fait mal* of the *Poems of Fresnés* (the preceding translation is that of the edition edited by Fr. Leonetti, will) [NdC].

Shoot down an jen of chance
Our brothers of the civil wars '.

He is subjected to trial. Condemning Brasillach is not easy. He is not a member of any political party nor has he held any positions or honours. All that can be attributed to him are newspaper articles.

But liberated France is thirsty for blood. “Those articles – thunders the public accuser Reboul – did more damage to the resistance than a battalion of the Wehrmacht ”. The sentence is death . “It's a shame!”, protests a spectator. “No, it's an honor” — Brasillach replies calmly .

A petition for mercy signed by Valery, Mauriac, Claudel, Anouilh, Camus, Gabriel, Marcel, Honegger, Daniel Rops, Cocteau and numerous others is implacably rejected by De Gaulle. Bra-sillach will be shot shouting “Courage!” to the firing squad .

* * * * *

Marcel Bucard, leader of the fascists and highly decorated in the "14-18" war , falls ; Commander de Messine, hero of Narvik, falls ; Jean Bassompierre, Action *Franqaise* militant and Charlema8 •e volunteer , Jean Luchaire with a cigarette in his mouth; George Suarez, rejecting the blindfold because "you have to see it through to the end this comedy"; Jean Pasquis, in a blue shirt, singing: *"It 's only a goodbye , my brothers...".*

Laval will die , after having tried in vain to poison himself, asking the magistrate who pushes him : “Are you in a hurry to go to breakfast ? I 'll show you how an old French Prime Minister dies ! The leader of the militia, Darnand, will fall, saying

[2] A century and a half has passed. / The season is even less certain, / Here is the time of Andrea Chénier. / On the closed and full prison / Another world has disappeared . / O black sun of our sorrow, / Another crowd is on the streets. / Like in the old week / Always asking to be killed . // Behind some bastion / At the end of the outskirts of our cities / Near the walls raised somewhere / The rifles of the mobile guards / They shoot down by gambling / Our brothers in the civil wars ” [NdC] .

to the young men of the platoon: "You would have deserved to be one of my little men" and — after receiving absolution — singing: *"A genoux, iious flmes le serinent iniliciens, to die in* 105,000 *chailtant.. .*

deaths will cost the anti-fascist repression of 1944-45.

No less than a million Frenchmen - it is *Le Figaro* of 6 April 1946 collaborationism: " anyone who admits it - will be imprisoned at the hands of traitors", as General De Gaulle will say.

THE GREAT ORDA

The great and most fearful threat looms from the East. Since the tragic days of Stalingrad , Bolshevism has continued its unstoppable march towards the West. On the wheels of tens of thousands of American trucks , with weapons coming from American factories , the Great Horde slides unstoppably towards Europe.

In Narva, on the eastern border of Estonia, the extreme outpost of Germanic culture and European civilization towards the East; in Narva , where the river of the same name separates the fortress of the Teutonic Order , the *Hermannbiirg,* from the fortress of Ivan the Terrible, /vòng - *rod,* the European volunteers of the *Waffen SS* offered memorable resistance to the Soviets for many months :

"We disembarked in Jovi. In forced marches we reached the small bridgehead beyond the blue waters of the Narva , just two kilometers deep...

We were already on the asphalt road and had reached the first houses . *"Gottverdomnie!"* the sentry shouted to us ... Dutch, who were keeping guard with the *Nederland* Brigade .

We were in this fascinating, mysterious city in Northern Europe which over the centuries had been attacked and contested many times , and which had intrepidly endured its harsh fate up to the present day . Perpetually surrounded by the blood of fires, it had always found itself at the center of the ardent desire of two different worlds : Europe and Russia .

Now the ruins testified to the ancient grandeur and beauty. Artillery fire and bombing had made this pearl of the North one of the most destroyed cities on the continent. Yet, no-

the narrow alleys, among the devastated houses , still lived the enchantment of the glorious past. The ancient portal of the *Stadtkir-che'* still stood , with the six skulls and the two torches, still watching the little ones putti on the arch of the door of the *Fonnesche Hans.* Even the stork of the *Rathaus2* tower looked warily towards the east, because it was from there that the little Soviet father 's iron salvos for his "favorite" Estonians came .

And still stood the two symbols of this heroic, devastated city: Hermann 's fortress and its powerful antagonist: *Ivangorod .* Thus Narva was , today as yesterday, at the focal center of the history of the North. Struggle and death, destruction and victory were always inextricably linked to the destiny of this city.

Following the German retreat, today as seven hundred years before, the gateway to Europe against the wave coming from the steppes stood on the Narva . They still fought in their trenches, in the Scattered *bunkers ,* in no man's land, men from all the Northern countries, together with Estonian volunteers for the life or death of European civilisation.

Not only we knew this, but also the Bolsheviks. Therefore they repeatedly attempted to take over this city of rubble. . .

Hurricanes of bombs rained down on the city and the bridgehead . A drumming fire that should have broken the morale of the defenders. Soviet tanks were trying to reach the bank of the fiercely defended river. But it was all in vain. The men whose ancestors had fought in Estonia with the Teutonic Knights and, before that, with the Danes and the Dutch, always rejected the hordes of the East. Like a rock , the little bridgehead of Narva broke the red wave and the Kremlin was forced to postpone its ambitious dreams of domination of the Baltic.

The Estonian comrades of the 20th Division of the *Waffen SS,* who defended the soil of their own homeland together with Europe , they had coined a battle cry that became the motto of the defenders of Narva: “From the rubble, arises vengeance!”».

Letter “City Church” [NdC].
' Municipality.

But if the front on the Narva holds for months, to the south, in Ukraine, nothing seems to be able to stop the march of the Red Army. On 24 March the Soviets reached the Dniester, occupying Cernauti on 29 March , Odessa on 1 April and Tarnopol on 14 April. The Russians cross the Romanian border and spread into northern Moldavia.

With difficulty, in early May they managed to contain them north of Jasi. However , they were pressing diplomatically to separate the Rumanians from the Germans.

Their conditions were harsh: payment of reparations to the USSR, loss of Bessarabia and Bukovina, transition of the Romanian armies to the orders of Moscow. Marshal Antonescu had rejected these proposals. This capable and upright soldier , this man who rose to the government of Romania due to his sympathies for the Iron Guard (even though in '41 he had to repress an extremist *putsch),* is one of the few that Hitler listened to with consideration and respect. He knows that one cannot come to an agreement with the Russians: behind their promises lies the desire to subjugate Romania by physically eliminating its ruling class. But others have illusions: at court, the young and fatuous King Michael is allowing himself to be convinced that he could save the crown by making a deal with Stalin.

On 22 June, while the Germans were sweating blood in the West to contain the Allied landing in Normandy, while many armored units were moving from the Russian front to that of the invasion, the Soviets unleashed the offensive.

Their superiority is overwhelming: 4000 tanks against 900; 29,000 guns versus 10,000; 5,300 Soviet airplanes against 1,300 Luftwaffe. The German lines in White Russia are shattered, Vitebsk and Mogilev taken by storm. You pass the Dnieper, the Drut, the Berezina.

In Bobr, the soldiers of the French Volunteer Legion are decimated while defending the road that leads from Moscow to Warsaw. For forty-eight hours, they resisted the hurricane:

"The legion is on the front line without heavy armament as for the anti-partisan fight...

Waves of *T 34s* pass in front of it for forty-eight hours and of *Shertnan,* waves of infantry supported by an overwhelming

artillery fire , from Stalin's organs and from the air force. The French crouch on the ground, let the wagons pass, then throw themselves on the infantry that follows them . Five assaults are repelled.
The village cemetery is lost , reconquered, lost again and reconquered again amid fierce melee and bayonet counterattacks. We fight day and night . The LVF destroys 14 armored mastodons. Some tank hunters open fire at less than thirty metres. Everywhere the Soviet infantry, advancing like a screaming horde, is being driven back .

The combat group was then taken over by *commandos* specialized in the destruction of railways and strategic fortifications: the Battle of Bobr saved thousands of European fighters from annihilation...

They retreated westward, through burned villages, forests echoing with the thunder of exploding ammunition depots, and fields where gigantic wagon carcasses burned . Carried by the flow of that shipwreck of Europe, every now and then they stopped , faced the horde, for three, four hours, and then set off again , in the middle of the night.

They finally reached the bank of a large river , a tributary of the Dnieper. And when the volunteers asked the officers the name of this river, they were told that it was the Beresina".

*****

The Red Army is spreading. On 3 July it is in Minsk, on the 13th in Vilna, on the 23rd in Lublin, on the 27th in Lviv and Daugavpils, on the 28th Brest-Litowsk falls, while the Soviet armored columns which overflowed into Lithuania turn north and reach the sea a few kilometers away . west of Riga . The German armies in Livonia and Estonia now seem cut off . Only an armored counterattack will re-establish links in August. Meanwhile, the Soviets have crossed the Vistula south -east of Warsaw , establishing a bridgehead there .

In Warsaw, the Poles raise their heads again, they hear the noise of battle approaching the city and they prepare to rise up.

The Arinjn *Crajowa,* the national comali liberation army

given by Count Tadeusz Komorowskì, known as "Bor", can count on 40,000 men, as many as the forces of the German garrison sca.

The Red Army is a few kilometers from the city: there is no time to waste. There are political reasons. On July 23 , the Soviets established a communist puppet government in Lublin , clearly demonstrating that they intended to Sovietize Poland .

Relations between the London government - on which Army *Crajowa* depends - and the Soviet Union are not the best. On June 22 , 1941, when the Germans attacked Russia , Poles and Russians found themselves , without enthusiasm , allies. One of the first acts of the Polish government was to ask for the return of the Polish soldiers taken prisoner in 1939, at the time of the partition of Poland . But 10,000 officers were no longer to be found . The Polish government bombards the Kremlin with questions; Stalin replies that there is no time to look for them. Finally, in April 1943, ha the Germans found the 10,000 Polish officers. They find them near Smolensk, in a mass grave, one on top of the other killed with a shot to the back of the head . Fragments of newspapers soaked in those poor bodies indicate the date of the massacre: spring 1940. The Red Cross confirms these data . The Polish government in exile breaks off relations with the Soviet government .

Now, on 1 August 1944, the Poles also rose up to create a political event that would allow the Polish national forces to be pitted against those exploited by Moscow.

The same Soviet broadcaster calls to incite the insurrection: the Red Army is coming, it's a matter of hours. The 38,000 men of " Bor " take action. Three fifths of the city quickly fell into their hands. But the Germans still control Tadella, the Radio Station, the airfields , the right bank of the Vistula and all the bridges leading to it.

Special SS units flock to Warsaw . The *Luftwaffe* bomb the insurgents. With cannons and mortars, the Poles were dislodged from the conquered neighborhoods . The fight is long and bloody. Himmler unleashed against the insurgents the Dirlewanger Brigade , made up of common prisoners , and the Kaminski Brigade, made up of Ukrainians who hate Poles . These elements lead to a

merciless war : the wounded, the nurses, the civilians are **killed.** The Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Front, Guderian, protested to Hitler against these excesses. Himmler withdraws the two brigades and has Kaminski shot.

We fight for the whole of August, for the whole of September.

The Red Army is now in the Prague suburb, across the Vistula. But it doesn't move . He witnesses the massacre of Polish nationalists by the SS impassively. The communists want the Germans to rid them of those hated "bourgeois" forces that could hinder the Boshevization of Poland.

He recalls Colonel Iranek-Osmecki, who participated in the insurrection: “On 4 August Churchill asked Stalin to help Var – saVia. The request it was rejected. A similar fate befell a new request to this effect presented by Churchill on the 12th of the same month and the text of the refusal, in which it was underlined that the Soviet authorities did not consider themselves responsible for what could have happened to the Allied planes which, bringing aid to Warsaw , had landed in Soviet camps, was also made known to the American ambassador in Moscow... The British government was so irritated by the Soviet attitude that in its meeting on 4 September the Cabinet of war even contemplated the possibility of suspending the sending of convoys to the Soviet Union across the Arctic

Furthermore, after concluding their operations against the Germans, some detachments of the national army taking part in the “Storm” operation east of the Vistula attempted to come to the aid of the units engaged in Warsaw.

All these detachments were surrounded and disarmed by the Red Army, and many officers and soldiers were deported to Soviet prison camps...

The refusal to intervene to help Warsaw exposed the true Soviet intentions towards Poland. The Poles regarded this refusal as a cowardly betrayal of an ally , and the entire civilized world was astounded by such a display of duplicity."

On October 2, the Warsaw insurgents surrender to the Germans. The Generale “Bor” is consegna as *group leader SS* von Bach-Zelewski.

Under the impassive eyes of the Soviets, the Warsaw uprising was crushed .

Meanwhile, the southern half of the Eastern front has also collapsed . On August 20 the Russians attacked in Moldova. The Fourth Romanian Army melted away like snow in the sun, almost without firing a shot. German troops are cut off from their bases . The catastrophe is looming which will overwhelm hundreds of thousands of soldiers of the German VI Army.

On the 23rd, King Michael invites Antonescu to meet. The marshal, forgetful of Mussolini's cases, goes there confidently, and finds himself arrested. A year later, the communists shot him. On August 25, as the Allies entered Paris , Romania declared war on Germany . On the 31st the Soviets enter Bucharest . With difficulty, the Germans try to escape beyond the Carpathians.

The Romanian army binds itself to the Russian one . One and a half million soldiers are deported to Russia as "work slaves ". The purge of officers begins. In a few years, hundreds of thousands of “bourgeois” will be eliminated in Romania.

On September 5 , the Soviets cross the Bulgarian border.

Bulgaria also hopes to save itself from disaster by changing sides and marching against Germany. The exodus of German troops from Greece begins, while the Soviets press the German armies in Transylvania , in the Banat, towards Belgrade.

Even in the far north the German front collapses. On 22 September the Soviets are in Tallinn, on 15 October in Riga, while their armored vanguards have already reached the Baltic north of Memel, imprisoning German divisions in the Courland pocket.

The tragedy of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian peoples takes place . In June '41 , the Germans had arrived just in time. The great deportation had already begun : no fewer than one hundred thousand men in Estonia and Latvia, even more in Lithuania - from 5 to 10 percent of the overall population - had been arrested and loaded onto trains bound for Siberia. It was the *intelligentsia,* as the Russians called the educated class, the "bourgeois". Once they had been eliminated, the denationalization of the Baltic peoples would have proceeded without shocks. But the German armored divisions had arrived just as the great deportation was underway .

Now, in the autumn of 1944, the Balts know what awaits them. When the Obergruppeat *hrer* Steiner - the defender of Nar - informs the Estonian adults that the Germans are evacuating Estonia , he hears the reply: " With these words, you pronounce the death sentence against the Estonian people ". The exodus of the Estonian ruling class begins, protected by the SS , followed by a tenth of the population of the Baltic states who will find refuge in the West, while another tenth will be deported .

Latvian: approx

* * * * *

The last defense of Estonia was carried out by the III *German Panzer Corps:* Germans, Dutch , Norwegians who were also joined by the Wallonie Motorized Brigade .

Léon Degrelle says :

"Behind us , the sight was heartbreaking. All of Estonia was fleeing from the Reds . There wasn't anyone who stayed at home . These people had known the Soviets, not those of 1918, but the so-called "civilian" ones of 1940... They retained a fear of them horrible.

It wasn't just the bourgeois who fled, but tens of thousands of peasants, Anigians, laborers ; the women struggled to herd a pig or two or three sheep. The poor beasts They had bloody hooves in front ...

I will remember the morning of August 23, 1944 as long as I live. Leaving Dorpat I was struck by the amount of trucks rushing into the city. Soldiers crowded around them from all sides . Then I passed some blocks that burst out running to the blowing of my bullets. One of

to be speed: a tank at breakneck

for. shoulder hitting the windshield. I jumped out of my *Volkswagen and* landed in the middle of the road , with the *Maschinepistole* in my fist. The Knight's Cross hung around my neck . This always produced a certain effect. Together

° Generate of the Army Corps [NdC].

due to the effect of the *Maschinepistole, I* made the driver of the truck stop.

"The Russians! The Russians! I'm there!". " Where?" I asked him .

"Five hundred meters further ! They're coming from all over !".

Five hundred meters away! In a flash, I realized the disaster . Not only had the Bolsheviks conquered Nôo, they were coming at full speed over the city of Dorpat itself ...

I had all the soldiers get off the first truck and the other two trucks that followed. Luckily there was a German non-commissioned officer who understood French wonderfully . I had him translate my orders: "We immediately launch a counterattack . This very evening, the bravest will have their Iron Cross . The Russians do n't expect our reaction . This is a good time to jump on them ! Everything is a question of audacity, comrades!".

Carrying with me these sixty soldiers who, just five minutes earlier, had been fleeing in all directions , I ran towards the Bolsheviks. ..

But what a situation! In the trench, half a kilometer long , and which was supposed to contain the entire enemy assault on the Rïga road , I found myself , by pure chance, at the head of an improvised defense, at the head of a small group of Estonians and Germans , gleaned under the lash of panic.

I had quickly catechized the most desperate and had thrown them onto the Russians ' trail through the nearby ditches . I had found a large and beautiful Soviet cannon on site , magnificently placed by the German sappers five meters from the road. It inexorably closed off access. But, unfortunately — nothing is ever perfect in this world — he only had one shot!

.. .General Wagner had to be notified . Were you aware of what had happened ? A soldier discovers a telephone wire. I managed to let me pass the *KommandantuiA* , then the general, absolutely surprised to learn what was happening and that I was on1 place... I promised him that, as long as I was alive , the Russians would not pass.

But I could have been overwhelmed, the Russian tanks could have come from a

The headquarters of the Command [NdC].

moment to moment. Men and tanks were needed , immediately and in quantity!

"Resist! Resist!", General Wagner shouted into the telephone , pouring out dozens of *"Grosse Scheisse! Grosse Scheisse !"'* perfectly in tune with the situation.

The Russians were getting stronger and stronger. They came from the south -eastern bushes , in small groups. .. I gave the order not to shoot unnecessarily. We had to conserve ammunition for the melee whose imminence was increasingly announced...

But behold, at eleven in the morning, I saw something coming out of the forest, to the south: a Panzer! Behind him came another. Then another . Soon there were eight!

...I grabbed the phone and called General Wagner: "We need tanks and Sindn$! "

"We do everything we can to help you. But it takes time. Resist! Resistete!".

Of course we would have resisted! But when the last twelve bombs had been fired, what would happen?

...A Soviet tank emerged behind the first barrier, loaded with about twenty infantrymen . The other five wagons followed him.

I still had time to shout on the phone to General Wagner: "Here we are! The Russian tanks are coming at us !". And there they were: they had already crossed the bridge and were climbing onto the shore . Thirty meters from us, enemy infantry jumped to the ground. It was the final assault.

All we had to do was fire our last cartridges and get killed. At the moment in which the last bombs exploded, a formidable roar rent the sky: it was the *Stukas,* the German *Stukas !* Forty! Forty *Stukas* dived down, whistling! Everything was blowing up! We ourselves were thrown from all sides, because the enemy tanks were now upon us and the *Stukas* were raging through the pile like possessed people.

Then, some Tigers also arrived...

In the evening, all the bureaucrats from the rear were with us in first class line to congratulate.

5Lett. "Big shit" [NdC].

A German colonel came to pick me up. I got back in my *Volkswagen* because General Wagner wanted to talk to me.

At midnight, a telegram from the *Fuhmi* Headquarters communicated *rer* that Hitler granted me the Oak Leaves."

Meanwhile, in the south, fighting is already taking place on Hungarian soil . West of Debrecen, a powerful German armored counterattack shatters the Soviet push towards the West . Unlike the Romanians , the Hungarian soldiers fight . The old traditions of camaraderie But the political situation gives good proof. cloudy every pin day . in the Austro-Hungarian state

HORTHY ATTEMPT TO RESCUE
ON THE EDGE

The Germans know that Admiral Horthy has been negotiating with the Allies for some time to effect the disengagement of Hungary. And they know that this would mean catastrophe for a million German soldiers still fighting in the Balconies , together with the Soviet penetration into Austria and the isolation of the armies fighting in Italy .

Against Horthy, the Germans can count on Ferenc Szàlasi, major of the Honved and head of the extremist Arrow Cross movement .

There is no time to lose. A proclamation of Szalasi as head of government is already being printed in a printing house in Vienna . But from the trucks that bring the parcels into Budapest, some of the papers fly away . A policeman collects them : by chance the official to whom he delivers them is a militant of the Arrow Cross , and the secret will not be revealed .

Meanwhile, at the "Wolf's Den", Hitler has summoned Mussolini's liberator , Otto Skorzeny. The Fiihrer explains the risks of the Hungarian situation and concludes: "You, Skorzeny, will take care of this Admiral Horthy."

But Skorzeny is in trouble. The Regent lives in Bu - dapest Castle, a mighty fortress surrounded by machine guns and guardhouses . Gruppenfiihrer Bach-Zelewski, Warsaw 's " peacemaker " , suggests a gigantic mortar capable of pulverizing the *Castle* . But Skorzeny knows that the feelings of the Hungarian population must not be offended by undermining the German -Hungarian camaraderie . Velvet gloves must be used .

The Regent has a son, “Miky” Horthy, known for his brilliant and busy life , and to whom his father is very fond, also because he would like him to be his successor to the government of Hungary. This son contacted Tito's emissaries to negotiate an armistice with the Red Army .

Skorzeny provides Miki Horthy with two "Tito emissaries", who turn out to be two Gestapo agents . In the building where the meeting takes place , the upper floor is already occupied by Skorzeny's men. Horthy 's son finds himself surrounded by the SS; his bodyguard shoots but is overwhelmed ; _ Skorzeny orders young Horthy to be wrapped in a carpet and smuggled across Budapest to the airport.

Wrapped in the carpet, “Miky” Horthy flies towards the safe shores of Mathausen. But the father doesn't give up. With the obstinacy of old men, he still speaks on the radio announcing Hungary's capitulation .

Now it's time to act.

Skorzeny puts himself at the head of a column made up of a car, 4 tanks and some *Goliaths,* miniature remote control tanks loaded with explosives . The column goes up to the Castle door , which is open. The Hungarian guards shout hallo; Skor - zeny slows down, says hello politely... and moves on. Now it is in the inner city. The wagons pass at the head, break through the brick walls and arrive in front of Horthy 's residence . The Regent has already realized that he has lost the game and has handed himself over to General von Pfeffer—Wildenbruch.

Skorzeny introduces himself to him and informs him that the *F'iihrer* is making Hirschberg Castle in Bavaria available to him . Szàlasi assumes power.

As in a Lehàr operetta, everything seems to have resolved itself for the best. One million Germans, validly supported by *Hon - ved,* continue to fight the invading Bolshevism.

' *Gestapo* stood for *Geheimnisstaatpolidei,* i.e. "Secret State Police" [N.d.C.].

2 Franz Lehàr (1870 -1948), Hungarian composer of operettas including *ve - dova allegra,* from 1905 [NdC].

AUTUMN 1944

At the end of October the crisis on the Eastern Front could be considered overcome.

The battle still raged in Hungary, the Red Army pressed menacingly from Croatia to Slovakia, along the Vistula, up to the old border of East Prussia.

But his advance was essentially blocked.

A penetration into the borders of East Prussia on 22 October was also rejected. A few days later, when the Germans reconquered the two villages of Goldap and Nemmersdorf, they found themselves faced with the following spectacle: all the houses had been burned, the women and girls raped and nailed alive to the doors of the farmhouses, the men tortured to death, infants tied together and crushed with the tracks of tanks. 40 French prisoners, employed in agricultural work, who had probably awaited the Soviets as "liberators", had also been massacred.

A breath of cold passed throughout Germany. Now the Germans knew what they had to expect if the Eastern front gave way
Still.

* * * * *

The crisis that opened on the Eastern Front between the end of August and the beginning of September 1944 was among the most serious. Still in January Hitler could deploy 200 German and 16 Allied divisions on the eastern front. Now, after the defection of Romania, of Bulgaria

and in Finland the German army found itself defending an even longer front with 120 of its own and 18 Hungarian divisions .

But the situation created on the Western Front and the rapid penetration of the Allies into Belgium jeopardized the Ruhr itself and the access routes to Germany . Von Rundstedt - recalled on 4 September as commander in chief of the Western Front - could have at his disposal, in place of the 62 divisions existing at the beginning of July, fragments of broken units whose effective strength did not exceed that of 25 divisions.

The Allies were advancing at full speed towards the German border with 2,000 tanks. The Germans could barely oppose 200: 2,300 tanks - and half a million men - had been lost in the battle of Normandy.

It is at this point that the "German miracle of the Marne" occurs - towards the middle of September - a temporary miracle.

With thirty thousand men supplied by the *Luftwaffe* , the "First Parachute Army" was quickly created and dropped between Antwerp and Liège . Another hundred thousand men - recruited wherever possible - they are sent to restore and guard the Siegfried Line. But the old *Westwall* of 1940 would need a radical renovation . The barbed wire has disappeared, the minefields have been removed, nor can the *bunkers* built in '39-'40 contain the 75 and 88 pieces in use, necessary against the tanks of 1944 .

Add to this the fact that many casemates are used as homes for bombed families or as warehouses for military supplies : one of the biggest problems - General Valrimont would recall - was finding who had the keys.

The situation in the war industries is also becoming dramatic. Since the great air offensives of the summer, rail traffic in the *Reich* has decreased by 50%, and river traffic by 75%. This means paralysis for entire sectors that no longer receive all the parts needed for production.

Despite this, Germany reached its peak in 1944. nor war production.

Having started lazily at the beginning of a “blitzkrieg” that Hitler predicted would be short, war production only really got underway in 1942 . Until that year the production of consumer goods had only been reduced by 3% .

Only Albert Speer - appointed Minister for Armaments in February 1942 - had given a new rhythm to the war industry. Already in August he had increased the production of weapons by 27%, that of tanks by 25 %, that of ammunition by 97%.

Overall , from February 1942 to July 1944 the *Reich* 's war production more than tripled , and this increased manpower by only 30 % . _

It is thus that - under the amazed eyes of the Allies, who had believed that Germany had reached the limit of productivity in 1941, in the era of its maximum tranquility and expansion , the *Reich* 's armaments had multiplied. In 1943, in 1944, under a rain of bombs that always fell thickly , the German factories had produced an ever- increasing number of rifles, bullets and tanks .

The figures of the German " war miracle" speak clearly:

1941: 5,200 tanks, 2,964 fighters, 7,000 guns, 1,359,000 small arms , 540,000 tons of ammunition;

1944: 27,300 tanks, 23,805 fighters, 41,000 guns , 2,586,000 small arms , 3,350,000 tons of ammunition.

And yet, the terrible bombings preceding the invasion of France had dealt very hard blows to the Reich 's production machine .

The most catastrophic situation was that of petrol, whose production had dropped from 968,000 tonnes produced in March to 345,000 in August . The loss of Romanian oil wells was to inflict another serious hit . The *Luftwaffe,* which had seen its monthly quantities of aviation gasoline decrease from 175,000 in April to 52,000 in June and plummet to 17,000 tons in August, was almost unable to fly .

In these conditions, it was practically useless that we had gone from a monthly production of 1,248 fighters in January to 1,523 in May to 2,036 in August. Due to a lack of petrol , the new pilots had to be trained in a time equal to a quarter of that available to English and American pilots , and this cost men and equipment .

Coal production had also plummeted from 71 million _ _

tons in the first quarter to 45 million in 1944; and that of steel from 9,200,000 to 3,900,000. Nonetheless, 2,438 *Tigers, Panthers* and *Mark IVs* were still produced between June, July and August and 1,764 between September, October and November, even if of the latter only 1371 actually reached the units at the front: around four hundred were immediately destroyed or in the factories . - briche or on via ferratas.

* * * * *

The Germans, struggling in such serious difficulties, were helped by the strategic errors of the Allies.

Instead of concentrating their armored forces in one point, breaking through the thin German defense on the northern and eastern frontiers of Belgium , and storming the Ruhr, they dispersed their force in an advance across the radius from Antwerp to Belfort.

Montgomery advocates decisive action towards the Ruhr or Holland. Eisenhower theoretically agrees to assign a priority to the army group in northern Belgium, but in practice gives in to the demands of Patton, who is advancing into Lorraine and also wants gasoline and supplies. Montgomery clashed harshly with Eisenhower and continued to insist on a new leap over the Meuse and the Rhine.

While precious days are wasted in these discussions , the Germans, with the force of desperation, give up their reservations
ve.

They are young people from the *Hitler Youth,* convalescent soldiers, reformed battalions , policemen, garrison units to which Göring has added battalions of parachutists and pilots forced to land due to lack of petrol. It's a mixture of questionable quality. But it holds.
These soldiers, mostly very young, replace the experience with a faith and fanaticism never seen before. Barricaded in farmhouses, along the canals and moors of Belgium, close to the rivers and marshes , they stop the enemy at the gates of their homeland.

Meanwhile, orders are given for all heavy tanks to go West.
But, in mid-September, the western front is still very vulnerable.

So that Montgomery, who partially succeeded in imposing the

his idea of a decisive blow, begins Operation *Market Garden* .

Three divisions of paratroopers, one British and two Americans, transported by 2,000 gliders and airplanes, and escorted by 4,000 fighters, launch themselves over the Meuse, over the Waal, over the Rhine to take the bridges over the rivers, over the canals, and overcome a leap the water barriers that hinder the advance towards Holland. The goal is the creation of a bridgehead across the Rhine , the liberation of the Netherlands and the direct threat to the Ruhr.

On Sunday 17 September, at midday, the sky of southern Holland is covered with planes that glide and roar over the surprised heads of the Germans. Then, thousands of white parachutes open and begin to descend . The Dutch are preparing to acclaim the liberators, the Germans are preparing to sell their lives dearly .

The 101st Division lands between Eindhoven and Veschel, conquers the bridges over the Zuid Willemsaart canal, and by nightfall also secures those over the Wilhelmina canal, opening the way for the British armored forces to burst across the Dutch border. The American 82nd Airborne Division also conquers the bridge over the Meuse at Grave and the bridge over the Meuse-Waal canal .
But at the bridge over the Waal, in Nijmegen, he encounters tenacious resistance and has to engage in tough fighting.

However, the greatest difficulties encountered by the 1st Air Division British transported, parachuted west of Arnhem .

The British hope to encounter little or no resistance. They missed a report from the Dutch resistance which states that a "Hohenstruffi Division" is present in Arnhem - which is none other than the 9th SS *Hohenstaufen* Armored Division - which , together with the 10th SS *Frundsberg* , is licking in the region of Arnhem, the wounds sustained in Normandy. They are semi-destroyed divisions, made up mostly of very young men, but still SS divisions, with tanks , and capable of giving the English a hard time .

Furthermore, the British almost rained on the head of the commander in chief of Army Group B, Field Marshal Model , known as "the *Führer* 's fireman " because Hitler always resorted to him to put out the most dangerous fires. of fire.

The " Führer 's fireman " is sipping his aperitif in a cottage *in* Oesterbeek , a few kilometers west of Arnhem, when

he sees the sky covered with parachutes. In an *instant* he is in his powerful *Mercedes* and Gruppenflihrer Bittrich is quick to take command . The alarm is raised . All the men present in Amhem begin to run towards the English drop zones . _

An English brigade reaches the bridge over the Rhine, but the others find themselves faced with the fanatical resistance of the *Waffen SS* men and are immobilized on the western outskirts . There are a few dozen men who, with their lightning -fast reaction, frustrate the plans of Montgomery 's " Red Devils " .

A survivor says :

"As a young volunteer I belonged to the 10th SS Armored Division Frundsberg in 1944 . After 15 months of training , at Easter '44 , I received my baptism of fire in Galicia . The following months were enough to make me an expert in all the tricks and hardships of war. During this period I was wounded three times . Yet, if I think back to the Arnhem experience , I still have the feeling of having participated in an extraordinary combat .

This time it wasn't the crash of shells and the familiar rumble of the front line . This time, the hurricane came from the sky ... Because we had seen a lot and suffered a lot . But the events of September 17th in Amhem made our blood freeze in our veins ...

A cloud of airplanes — often with gliders in tow — filled the sky of the city. Waves of paratroopers descended on us one after another . As soon as they had touched the ground, new waves of planes appeared on the horizon and dropped off new paratroopers .

For our part , there was no anti-aircraft fire or barrage . There were only garrison troops in the city , and even those in small numbers . Furthermore, a few people from the *Todt',* the Labor Service , the health department, doctors, nurses and all the usual. We believed we-

The Todt Organization was responsible for the construction of defense works and infrastructures necessary for the German armed forces located outside the borders of Germany . It took its name from Fritz Todt , German Armaments Minister until February 1942 , when he died in a plane crash .

it was unlikely that it was the end. An emergency company from *Hohenstaufen* ran at breakneck speed.

We too had to hurry to get orders and weapons. In the armory we found a machine gun, some brand new carbines and cases of hand grenades . It was the Division depot that
now it was distributed to us. We also filled the empty gas masks with ammunition .

In the meantime, the Dutch people in the nearby houses had recovered from their fear and were watching our comings and goings with amused faces . After an hour a Command bus picked us up to take us to the positions of the SS Training Battalion , stationed in Arnheni, which had already gone into action.

In the city, an indescribable confusion! Soldiers ran from here to there. Sailors with only one shoe , airmen in uniforms for free , men from the *Todt,* from the Labor Service , boys from the Hitler Youth assigned to digging trenches were hurrying from all sides . The driver stopped at the corner of a house and dropped us off: "Over there - and he pointed to a fir forest - it's Wolfheze! There you will find your Battalion"...

From Wolfheze the sounds of battle could be heard. From the suburb of Oesterbeek we heard the jubilant shouts of the Dutch . Evidently the English had occupied the suburb without encountering resistance and were now being celebrated by the inhabitants. We proposed to the Company Chief to send a patrol to observe. But he didn't want to and had the Company take up positions behind some houses . So, we 13 of the SS decided to do our own thing . We had to try to find out what was happening down there and take action to defend the bridges.

So we advanced cautiously to the Oesterbeek station and from there the whole view of the bridge over the river opened up to us . On a small hill, not far from the station, there were about a hundred Dutch people curiously admiring the parachutists' jumps.
As soon as they saw us , they started teasing us: "Hey, look at that , now the Krauts are coming too!", they shouted to each other , laughing. From the other side they saw the English arriving and were already hoping to witness our rapid and inglorious capture. But he's wrong-room...

At this point I too saw them coming. Enemy paratroopers see

dressed in camouflage suits and armed like us. In a few seconds we were on top of each other. We were so close we could see the whites of their eyes. In an instant, we took cover and let the weapons do the talking . A salvo of hand grenades followed them. After 5 minutes there were no longer any enemy patrols in sight . We also had an injured person. Everything had happened so quickly that our machine gunners hadn't even noticed what had happened. It was then that we saw an entire enemy battalion coming at us from the station's underpass. With the machine gun, he managed to disperse them and force them to stay under cover.

A longer fight began. Thirty men from the *Hohenstaufen* came to our aid, bringing machine guns with them. We had losses. Of the 13 of us from *Frundsberg,* only 3 remained alive.

For two whole days we managed to hold the position. Then we had to retreat. We from *Frundsberg* had remained together and had entrenched ourselves in the garden of the electrician Swiening. Shots from all sides , continuously! On the second day I realized that the English wanted to surround the road. Red berets could be seen everywhere ! Our machine gun began to fire . I saw some dead and many wounded. I had a moment of panic. For a moment, I would have even given up. It was then that I saw 12 Englishmen coming at me with *Maschinepistolen* aimed. I pressed and fired one magazine after another. They had already taken cover, targeting me with massive fire . So I started bombarding them with hand grenades and managed to keep them quiet. As I saw some of them dead, I took advantage of the and I jumped through the closed window in the electrician's house to find safety inside the house. But the women begged me not to stay there, and I agreed to their request . I found a comrade on the landing and with him I reached the courtyard , where we still had to get rid of a couple of Englishmen: a damned shootout. Next to me was the only survivor of the 13 from *Frundsberg,* my comrade Paulik. We emptied seven magazines. Then an English bullet pierced my foot. As I fell , I had time to hear the roar of the *Hohenstaufen* tanks that were arriving."

A few dozen SS men , facing an entire division of British paratroopers alone , frustrated the surprise of the enemy's plans .

German armored units arrive. An English brigade
it reached the bridge over the Rhine, at Arnhem, but was soon besieged . The others remain stranded in the western suburbs of the city.

Meanwhile, the Germans have launched counterattacks against the American paratroopers who are trying to seize the Nijmegen bridge.
From the Reichswald , SS armored units press on the enemy's flank . But, on 19 September , the vanguards of the British XXX Corps reunited with the American paratroopers. On the 20th, with a combined attack, the Nijmegen bridge was taken. The 16 kilometers that divide Nijmegen from Arnhem remain to be overcome .

But at Arnhem, on the 21st, the British brigade was stationed on the bridge, after 4 days of fierce fighting, she is overwhelmed. The rest of the division forms a defensive perimeter to the west of the city. A last stand is attempted to give the British armored divisions time to arrive.

Between Nijmegen and Arnhem, German resistance is insurmountable .

* * * * *

On the 25th, the last survivors of the Arnhem landing , torn, hungry, wounded, begin to cross the Rhine again.

followed

Of the 10,000 who landed in Arnhem, eight days earlier, only 2,000 regained the Allied lines. 1,200 died , the rest prisoners.

The British 1st Airborne Division, the pride of the British Army, is destroyed.

The Allies have indeed taken the bridges over the Meuse and the Waal, but the decisive bridge , the Arnhem bridge - the bridge over the Rhine - remains in German hands .

Another six months will pass before allied soldiers set foot across the Rhine again. The Dutch will still wait a long time for the "liberators". The Ruhr is safe .

In Arnhem the offensive momentum he had brought was extinguished the allied troops in the space of a month from Normandy to the Rhine.

The slow and bloody conquest of Aachen - from 2 to 21 October - will not be able to change the situation . Meanwhile, on the other side of *Westville,* Hitler is arming 25 new divisions, because - as he told his generals - winter is pressing and with winter fog , night and snow will provide us with a decisive opportunity".

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS

When Hitler spoke to his generals about the "fog and snow " intended to provide him with new possibilities for maneuver, he recalled the experience of the Normandy landings .

In Normandy, the Germans were defeated because an army of enemy airplanes was stationed continuously above them . Any of their initiatives, any movement of troops were nipped in the bud by the Allied air superiority . This was equivalent to saying that the Germans could only win if the Allied planes were unable to get airborne .

On the border between Belgium and Germany the winter is harsh and foggy . Weeks of haze are frequent. As winter approached , Hitler saw the time coming when bad weather conditions would offer natural protection against enemy bombers . For this moment he was exhausting his reserves. By emptying the Air Force and Navy, scouring the workshops, lowering the age of those recalled to sixteen and a half, from August onwards half a million men had been gathered . Young men , imbued with the National Socialist spirit , ready to fight to the end. With these men Hitler had formed 25 new divisions arming them with the best of German production .

Neither the threat on the eastern front nor the fighting in Aachen had led him to sacrifice this reserve. It was intended for the offensive on Day X.

Most expected this offensive in the East . The Wehrmacht high command would have favorably considered a maneuver aimed at easing *Soviet* pressure on the Vistula. The threat

Russian cia cast its shadows on the eastern territories of Germany . But Hitler had a different opinion .

No decisive success was possible in the East . Red Army bases and supplies were too deep into Soviet territory . If it had not been possible to reach these bases in 1941, even more so it was impossible at the end of 1944.

Furthermore, the Soviet army lined up something like two hundred divisions . In contrast, the Allies had about fifty in line
divisions that the summer fighting had hit hard

try. Added to this was the precariousness of their supply system. The ports of the Atlantic had been completely destroyed by the Germans. In some of them - Lorient Saint Nazaire, La Rochelle - German garrisons resisted and would resist until 7 May 1945 .

Only one port had fallen intact into the hands of the Allies, that of Antwerp. Liberated on 4 September, Antwerp was also unusable until the end of November.

Only at that time had the English managed to flush out the German forces nestled in the Scheldt estuary. Only when the last German Allied convoy had been dislodged would the large supply depots be available to the first from Beveland into the Belgian-Dutch border of the Flanders.

Antwerp was therefore the key to Allied supplies . But Antwerp was still not far from the German front. And just behind the front there were also the large gasoline depots of the American army that a bold armored offensive could have taken.
be intact.

But at what point can we break through the enemy front? Fate it seems present the opportunity of 1940 to Hitler again .

At that time the tanks of Rommel and Guderian had emerged from the Ardennes area , opening a passage towards the sea in Sedan. Even now , the Ardennes sector was the weak point of the array.
ment.

North of the Ardennes, between Geilenkirchen and Monschau, on a 60 kilometer front , the Americans have deployed 16 divisions. South of the Ardennes, on a 90 kilometer front , 10 divisions. In the Ardennes, on a 15 kilometer front , 5 divisions; this is where Hi-

tler prepares to strike. With the utmost secrecy, 28 divisions massed close to the Ardennes .

Sepp Dietrich 's 6th SS *Panzer Corps* will break through the enemy front in front of Malmedy and then proceed quickly towards the Meuse , cross it quickly at Huy and Andenne and march on Antwerp.

Further south , von Manteuffel's 5th *Panzer Corps* will open a gap between Saint Vith and Bastogne to cross the Meuse at Namur and Diant Dinant and reconquer Brussels .

In Luxembourg, the 7th Army will protect the southern flank.

This offensive launched by a *Wehrmacht* against the Germans was reckless extremes in the heart of December.

But Hitler knows that spring will bring the invasion of the *Reich* by east and west. Therefore, try to prevent it by attacking first. The the day the German tanks entered Antwerp the British and Americans would suffer a second Dunkirk. Maybe that day we could discuss it again. And, in any case, the gain in time would allow us to prepare the "new weapons". From 1945 Germany will be able to produce 200 jet fighters every month, outclassing the enemy air force.

And yet, this offensive modeled on the great victory of 1940 presents no small differences from the beginning .

In 1940, the Germans attacked not with 25, but with 44 divisions . Then the *Stukas* roamed the sky which today is dominion of Allied bombers. And the new divisions - even if they bear old glorious names - are often made up of inexperienced young people.

Add to this that the Germans have no petrol. Any possible advance beyond the Meuse is conditioned by the capture of American depots.

Too many "ifs" cloud Hitler's plan: if the surprise will be absolute, if the fog will prevent the enemy aircraft from flying, if the petrol depots will be captured intact... And yet the morale of the troops is very high . But the old von Rundstedt - who as supreme commander must endorse the operation with his name - is sceptical . He said: “Antwerp? Antwerp is the moon. If only we manage to get to the Meuse we can get down on our knees and thank God!”

But then, in mid- December, meteorological observers guaranteed Hitler several days of haze. The adventure has begun

Uncle. What the Americans will call " the battle of the giants" begins .

* * * * *

The night between 15 and 16 December 1944 is one of the longest , coldest and darkest of the year . General Bradley 's infantrymen are staying warm in their shelters thinking about the approaching Christmas . _ They don't imagine that 200,000 men with 1,000 tanks are about to descend on them .

In the German camp, the instructions and directives are repeated . In the north, Sepp Dietrich will attack the heights of Monschau and Elsenborn, on the road to Liège. In the center, von Manteuffel will wrest the heights of the Schnee Eifel from the Americans and advance westward along the Ourthe valley . In the south we will cross Luxembourg , running along the Sure, towards Bastogne, Saint Hubert, Rochefort.

The young German recruits are burning with impatience. A letter found on a very young man from the *Hitler Youth* Division says: " I am writing to you in a brief moment of pause before the attack , full of hope and excitement for what will happen in the next few days.. Some believe in life, but life is not everything . It is enough to know that we are attacking again and that we will drive the enemy from the soil of the homeland ... Around me is the deafening noise of cannons and VI , the voice of war". On the envelope it is still written: "Ruth Ruth Ruth! WE ARE MARCHING!".

The letter no longer had time to be sent.

At dawn on 16 December an avalanche of fire fell on the defenders of the Ardennes. Then , beams of searchlights illuminate the low clouds and, in their glare, the German infantry sets off .

Elsewhere there is no preparation. Wearing overalls as white as snow , the Germans silently descend on enemy outposts, liquidating them with dagger blows.

Everywhere, the surprise is absolute.

But, in front of Monschau , the American lines , reinforced by artillery units destined against the Roer dams , did not give in . Sepp Dietrich must set the pace. His *Grenadiers* repeatedly attack in vain . _ They are seventeen- year-old boys , at fire for the first time . They fall on the American trenches,

being massacred, but without success. The most direct access route to Liège remains blocked.

immediately to the south, operates one of the of the youngest and most SS officers , Colonel Jochen Peiper, of the 1st SS Armored Division Leibstandarte *Adolf Hitler* . Enraged because the *Volksgreiiadiere* were unable to break through , Peiper placed himself at the *head* of the column . Along little- known paths , cutting through the woods, he breaks through the American front . The GIs warming themselves at the fire in the Siegfried Line *bunkers* taken from the Germans see Peiper's gigantic Kànigsti *ger* emerging from the deep forests of the Ardennes . They flee in disorder . The way to Malmedy is

open.

At 4 in the morning of the 17th the Peiper column began its lightning- fast advance. Behind it are 40 American army trucks with the Skorzeny "Trojan Horse" Brigade on board : Germans who speak perfect English , dressed and armed like US soldiers . Skorzeny 's men mix with the fleeing American units , reverse the road signs, block SaSt ¥ O roads .

from reinforcements, they artfully spread voices of alarm

and they advance without stopping . Some tanks end up on mines. But Peifor he doesn't care . He proceeds impassively at the head of the column.

At 4 you reach the Baugnez-Malmedy crossroads . An American column arrives . It is overwhelmed, and the prisoners left behind. A few minutes later while the advance continues.

the bulk of the vanguard arrives . He sees the Americans coming forward, and opens fire. This is the so-called "Malmedy massacre " , which resulted in Peiper being sentenced to death , before an investigation by the United States Senate re- established the truth about the matter.

We are still moving forward.

Ligneuville is taken, forcing General Timberlake to hastily leave his tent at coffee time . On the morning of the 19th Peiper enters Stavelot . The resistance of some civilians is broken. Degrelle is also following the offensive; has the task of governing
Belgium .

The Peiper column continues to advance west along the narrow Ambléve valley . Focus on Stouamont. The American Headquarters - which in the first two days of the offensive was unable to

to have only fragmentary news (Skorzeny's men have cut the telephones) - he learns that German tanks are passing fifteen kilometers further south and hastily demobilizes .

Finally, in the early afternoon of the 18th, we reached the bridge te sulla Salm, in Trois-Ponts.

But a group of American engineers is on the lookout. They see Peiper's tanks on the bridge over the Ambléve, but manage to blow up the bridge over the Salm just as the first *Panzers* enter it. "If we had taken that bridge intact – Peiper recalls – getting to the Meuse would have been a joke".

The fate of the Peiper column is sealed. Forced onto the right bank of the Ambléve, stuck in a narrow valley, it was no longer able to achieve any strategic success .

We advance on Cour and Stouamont. But petrol is now running out . The Americans have a gigantic warehouse there . But as the men try to take it over, the GIs set fire to a wall of bins and Peiper finds himself facing a wall of fire. His rearguards are threatened by an Allied counterattack at Stavelot. On 23 December the Peiper column, decimated by the air force, will have to withdraw.

Sepp Dietrich is stopped, Peiper bottled up west of Stavelot . But the southern wing of the gigantic maneuver is still in motion. ment.

Manteuffel's men surrounded and surrounded

on the Schnee Eifel two entire American regiments captured 9,000 men almost without firing a shot. The way to Saint Vith is open .

But in Saint Vith the Germans clash, come up against stiff resistance. The same is true in Bastogne, where the *Grenadiere* arrive two days late after having flushed out the enemy resistance nuclei one by one . Not all Americans fled. On average , the German soldier is better, but the battles of Tunisia and Normandy have hardened the skin of many GI units , and the seven-year-olds of Dietrich and Manteuffel barely get by on the veterans of Kesserine and Cherbourg.

Saint Vith and Bastogne resist. But Wiltz and Houffalize were reached on December 19 by German forces. On the 20th , the tip of Manteuffel's armored offensive - the 2nd *Panzerdivision* - moved beyond the Ourthe, to Ourtheville. The Meuse is only 37 kilometers away . But he has no more petrol, and has to stop for a day in-
that.

Meanwhile, the enemy is in a panic. The news of the German breakthrough spread enormous confusion in the Allied camp .

The air force is forced to the ground, and the Americans don't even know where the leading columns of the German advance are. The *Panzers* suddenly emerge from the fog in locations that until a few hours earlier everyone thought were safe.

Skorzeny 's commandos also contributed to disorientating the enemy . You can see them everywhere now. Starting from the correct principle that they can speak English but not read Mickey Mouse, suspicious types are questioned about comic book heroes. Many officers who don't know how to answer end up in jail.

Meanwhile, while the Americans arrest each other and question Mickey Mouse, one of these *commandos* has actually reached the Meuse. No one suspects that the MPs who sort the traffic on the Huy bridge are Skorzeny 's soldiers waiting for the first German tank to appear on the horizon.

We are trying to break through further south .

In the central sector of the Ardennes, Saint Vith finally fell on the evening of the 21st. The following day, 14,000 of its 22,000 defenders began to cross the Salm, retreating from Vielsam and Salmchateau. But the Saint Vith salient delayed the Germans' breakthrough maneuver by at least four days and now , in Manhay, Hotton, Grandemil, there is the wall.

We try to go even further south. But, here too, the Bastogne resistance blocks Manteuffel 's *Panzerdivisionen* from the only major road heading west . The reconstituted *Panzerlehr* clashes against the city's defenses in vain. The 101st American Parachute Division, which rushed from Reims, had time to entrench itself there . On the 22nd the German commander asks for surrender in vain. He will have General MacAuliffe's famous response: "Bullshit!".

Meanwhile, the sky has cleared. An anticyclonic area has swept the sky in which the Allied bombers begin to buzz .

Running on its tracks on frozen slopes , the 2nd *Panzerdivision* desperately tries to reach the Meuse before it is too late . On the 23rd you quickly pass Saint Hubert, La Roche, Rochefort. At dawn on 24 December - it is Christmas Eve - the flagship tanks of the 2nd *Panzer Division* reach Celles, on the edge of the terrace overlooking the Meuse. Eight kilometers below the river sparkles in the first rays of the December sun .

But the English have arrived too .

From the opposite bank, their artillery fires. From Ciney, the Americans counterattack. In the finally clear sky the Allied air force ferociously targets the German columns.

For three days the 2nd *Panzerdivision* fought to maintain its positions . But she is alone. The 116th Armored Division is engaged in front of Hotton, the *Panzerlehr* in Bastogne. When the *Panzerlehr* arrives , on Boxing Day, it can do nothing for the intrepid tankmen of the 2nd Armored Division , but only collect the 1,500 survivors . Of the 88 tanks, 81 were destroyed.

On the same day, Patton unlocked Bastogne. The last great German offensive is over. The tanks of the most illustrious *Panzer Divisions* lie destroyed without petrol on the snowy plains of the Ardennes .

On foot, with difficulty, Hitler 's armies retreat towards the German border.

THE SIEGE OF BUDAPEST

After the defection of Romania and Bulgaria , the coup de main of 15 October allowed the Germans to continue to have access to their Hungarian ally. Having seized Horthy , the Germans had managed to impose Ferenc Szàlasi as Head of Government without difficulty . Most army officers were pro- German, and the police were known for their anti-Communist and pro-Nazi sentiments. On the other hand, the news that came from that part of Hungary occupied by the Russians was such as to induce even those who harbored completely different feelings to resist . At the end of September the *Honveds* had temporarily managed to reoccupy the town of Szalonta: what they had seen there had had more effect than entire years of anti-Bolshevik propaganda.

Upon assuming power, Szalasi had addressed the following message to Hitler :

"I address you , Excellency, in my capacity as Head of State and President of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Hungary , as the Supreme Leader in the present, titanic clash of world conceptions and the designated *Fiihrer* of the nascent European community . I announce to you that Hungary is now aligned totally and without any reservations in the ideal front constituted by the Anti -Comintern and Tripartite pacts and that the Hungarian army is fighting resolutely and resolutely alongside its great German ally... ".

On November 4 , in the festive rooms of the Royal Palace, the exponents of the new regime, together with numerous parliamentarians and high officials , but also the representatives of the nobility with the characteristic costumes , the *Diszmag yar* and the scimitars , had met . From-

The Crown of Saint Stephen - a thousand-year-old symbol of the Kingdom of Hungary - had been brought before a pale and moved Szàlasi and in the shadow of the halberds of the Crown Guard the new Head of State had taken the oath.

But, despite the proclamations and solemnities , the situation in Hungary remained desperate.

On October 20 , after ten days of hard fighting, the Russians had finally managed to conquer Debrecen. At the same time, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front descended from the Carpathians into the so-called " Transcarpathian Ukraine " and occupied Mukatchevo on the 26th and Uzgorod on the 28th.

To the south, Marshal Tolbuchin's army, coming from Voi-vodina, had occupied Baja on the Danube on 22 October. From this day the Russians had not stopped advancing northwards between Ti-bisco and Danube, occupying Kiskunhalas.

October 29th had been a black day for Army Group South . With 300 tanks and massive air support, the Red Army had managed to break through the German front at Kecsemet.

Budapest now seemed within reach and Marshal Malinovsky was already preparing to celebrate the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution there. The London newspapers were already coming out with the headlines: *"Bu-dapest is falling. Russian tanks break into suburbs".*

But the Russians would still have to wait more than three months before subduing the Hungarian capital.

The situation of the German armies in Hungary at the beginning of November was far from encouraging. The entire Army Group South had only 146 tanks and assault guns , which is less than a single armored division should have had . The battalions now numbered from one hundred to two hundred men. For every hundred meters of front, an average of 3 and a half men could be available . The 13th *Panzerdivision* still had two tanks, the 24th *Panzerdivision* not even one but only 7 armored cars. The luckiest of the armored divisions still had 8 tanks : the others, on average, 4 to 5. Even the fighting strength of the *Hon-veds* - estimated , a month earlier, at 20 divisions - was now somewhat vague . Even less armed than the Germans, and much worse organised, the Magyar infantrymen generally opposed

weak resistance.

In these desperate conditions, however, it was possible to inflict very heavy losses on the Russians (the march on Budapest cost them more than 600 tanks), and to stop them in front of the Hungarian capital.

Village after village, city after city, Hungary fell into the Soviet grip. The arrival of the "Red Army, liberator of the oppressed people" marked the beginning of an endless series of brutality.

"Come on, come on!" and "Davaj denghi!", "Give me the watch!" and "Give me the money!" are the first two Russian phrases that Romanians, Yugoslavians and Hungarians learn to know. In Romania and Yugoslavia there is still the fear of having allies . Marshal Tito sends Gilas to Moscow to protest to Stalin because in Belgrade the soldiers of the Red Army have robbed passers-by and raped women, where Gilas finds an Olympian Stalin who laughs sovereignly at these trifles.

In Hungary, the Soviet soldier has no obligations. The looting is total, the hunt for women continues and ruthless. Anyone who resists is killed on the spot. The nights are enlivened by gangs of MSSI soldiers who - guzzling liters of alcohol - flush out the female population from their hiding places. Complaining to the officials is useless, you risk being called "provocateurs" and "fascists".

The Red Army does not carry supplies with them. It lives from the conquered country .

In Hungary alone, it requisitions 4,000,000 tons of wheat and corn, 500,000 horses, 2,200,000 pigs, 1,500,000 sheep, 1,200,000 oxen, 18,000,000 chickens, hens and geese, as well as many millions of liters of alcohol. The official requisitions are combined with individual looting so that the population finds itself literally stripped and starving. Once the war is over, there will be the robbery of industrial machinery dismantled and transported to Russia.

At the end of November the Russians were masters of the territory between the Tisza and the Danube. Miskloc would fall on December 3 ; Budapest was now little more than a bridgehead through whose suburbs the front passed. But an even greater threat loomed.

Already on November 7 the Russians had crossed the Danube marshes near Apatin at night. On November 27 they left their bridgehead, taking Mohacs and Pecs. In the first

but by the week of December their tanks were now racing beyond Kaposvar , towards Balaton, reached on 7 December.

Meanwhile, in Ercsi, a few kilometers south of Budapest, other units had crossed the river: the maneuver aimed at cutting off Budapest from the west , completely isolating it, was now clear.
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Since November 4 , when Mali-novsky 's Russian-Romanian armies had reached the south-eastern edge of its suburbs , Budapest was a front - line city . One after another its lines of communication were cut . Yet the same elegant and carefree life still flourished in the city . It seemed that Budapest - one of the liveliest and most fascinating capitals in Europe - wanted to repay itself in a few weeks for the many dark years that awaited it .

On the bridges that connect Buda to Pest , German sentries kept watch every twenty steps . On the Lungo Danube, the sumptuous setting of the renowned Ritz, Bristol, Hungaria and Carlton *hotels ,* already a place for elegant walks, columns in war gear were working . But at five o'clock, as usual, the Negrescu was teeming with idle and chatty patrons, at seven the Bar Ungaria or the Du Barry were filled with *bon-vivants* looking for a good *tokai or* an aperitif. At dinner time , a few isolated Soviet aircraft dropped bombs , but the waiters continued to serve without getting too upset.
Wine, *champagne* and *barkz y* flowed freely; women indulged themselves without much thought, in an end -of -the- world euphoria .

The soldiers entrenched a few kilometers from the city, for the modest price of a tram ticket (50 *Filler)* could forget the hardships of war with a good bath and a good drink .

The last act of the encirclement of Budapest took place on 8 December it had begun on the bend of the Danube, the Russians had stormed Vac, closing the circle from the north. On the right bank of the river , the Germans had entrenched themselves in the *Mar8ciretlienstellun8'* Which from the north-eastern corner of Lake Balaton, leaning on the Lake

Lett. "posizione Margarethen" [NdC

go of Velence, reached the southern suburbs of Buda. But the "Margaretlie line " was far from representing serious resistance : it had no minefields, no heavy pieces , no fresh troops to man it .

For ten days the Russians stopped in front of the German lines. On December 20, with 20 divisions and several motorized corps , they broke through them with momentum. On the 23rd the oldest Hungarian capital, Szeke-sféhervar, was in Soviet hands. The next day - Christmas Eve - the Red Army tanks appeared on the western edge of Buda , penetrating the town here and there and blocking the way to Vienna. Several citizens of Buda who had gone to Pest that morning to do their Christmas shopping saw their family members again two months later .

The siege of Budapest had begun.

* * * * *

In Budapest the *SS Obergruppenfiihrer* Pfeffer von Wildenbruch remained surrounded by the IX SS Corps , which includes the 8th SS Division *Floryan Geyer* and *the* 22nd SS *Maria Theresia ,* mainly composed of *Volksdeutschen2 .* To them is added the 1st Hungarian Army of General Ivan von Hindy. Overall, 37,000 Germans and 33,000 Hungarians. 80,000 live in the city civilians.

To supply food , medicines and petrol (in the besieged city there are 70 tanks and armored cars) 80 tonnes of launches would be needed per day. The *Luftwaffe* is preparing for this enormous task which will cost it 105 planes shot down.

But air supplies soon prove insufficient . Attempts are being made to smuggle supplies up the river — under the noses of the Russians. And yet even this kind of help is difficult. The first ship sinks into the sand and can only be unloaded with difficulty . The privations to which the population and troops are exposed will become ever greater . Pfeffer von Wildenbruch evacuates the outer districts of Pest and concentrates his forces on the right bank of the Danube ,

2Mostly Austrians , Hungarians, German speakers from Sudetenland and Poland etc. [N.d.C.].

Buda. This is the highest part of the city on whose hills the Citadel and the Royal Palace stand . It is the side from which the liberating counter-offensive is expected .

And in fact Hitler is preparing a counter-offensive for deliver Budapest from reoccupy *the Margarethenstellung.*

The Ardennes offensive has now clearly failed and threatening clouds are pressing on the Vistula - the most direct access to Berlin is threatened - but Hitler is completely absorbed by the Hungarian situation.

Whether he wants to achieve a psychological success with the liberation of Budapest , whether he wants to keep the road to Vienna blocked, whether he is concerned about the Hungarian oil deposits or remembers the promise made to Szalasi to "defend Hungary as if it were - if a piece of Germany" - Hitler is preparing to play his last cards in Hungary .

Behind the Naszaly-Mor-Osi line, which vertically connects the Da-nubio with the northern end of the Balaton, the IV SS *Panzerkorps,* with the *Totenkopf and Wiking* divisions brought in from Poland, and the 3rd *Panzerkorps* are preparing to move to11 'offensive.

At half past ten in the evening of January 1, 1945, without any artillery preparation, the Germans fell on the Soviet lines.

In the bitterly cold night , illuminated by a glacial full moon, the assault groups massacred the Russian outposts and opened the way for the bulk of the troops. Meanwhile, a flotilla of one hundred boats leaves the north bank of the Danube and lands among the Russians at Suttö and Nyergesuyfalu.

The surprise is absolute, the success rapid.

Already the next day the Germans reoccupy Felsögalla, Tata, Bajna, Tarjan. The focus is on the important railway junction of Bickse. The Russians are eliminated from the Vertes games . But the wooded terrain slows down the movement of the tanks. In front of Bickse we mark the pace.

On day 4 the Russians had already recovered from the surprise. No fewer than 900 airplanes come to their aid. The 5th SS Division *Wiking* still advances, but only by 5 kilometers. The III SS *To-tenkopf* advances on Zsymbek and in some places surpasses the Bickse railway. But the decisive breakthrough does not take place.

It is January 5th : the Russian defenses have strengthened on the Bickse-Many-Tinnie line. In five days of offensive the IV SS *Pan-*

Zerkorps destroyed or captured 79 tanks and 160 enemy guns. But it is stopped 21 kilometers from Budapest. To the north, along the Danube , successes are still being reported. On the 6th the ancient episcopal city of Ezstergam was reconquered .

But at this point a serious threat presents itself on the north bank of the Danube. The Russians break through the German lines on Ipel
and advance towards Komamo. The capture of this city with its bridge would interrupt communications between Hungary and Slovakia. On the 8th the Soviet tanks are in front of Korman and Nové Zamke.
They have already crossed the Nitra River. It seems that the march on Budapest will have to be interrupted to bring troops north of the Danube.
But, at the last moment, the Russians find themselves in difficulty. The river Hron is in flood; their supplies are late; the offensive thrust is exhausted.

On the 9th the Germans restart their attacks to liberate Budapest. We advance from the area of Mor and Varpalota, conquering Sarkeresztes and approaching Zamoly and Csakvār. On the 11th, Za-moly is in German hands.

But the main direction of march was moved north , between
the Pilis mountains. The *Wiking* Division moved here and, starting from the 10th, attacked along the ancient Roman road:

"The *Waffen* SS units advanced with unexpected rapidity.
To their surprise, in the vicinity of Pilisszentelélek they found a German hospital full of wounded which had had to be abandoned after the sudden advance of the III Ukrainian Front on 22 December 1944 ... Lacking forces, the Red Army had not even had to - occupied the locality. On 12 January the *Westerland* Regiment took over the locality of Pilìsszentkereszt, encountering very weak enemy resistance.
The Germans had thus arrived just 21 kilometers from Budapest. The following day the *SS StandartenführeH* Ullrich from the heights of Dorogako could already distinguish the bell towers of the besieged city among the first mists of dawn . Campfires could be seen on the hills and the Waffen *SS* Panzergrenadiere *could* already hear the *roar* of the Battle of Budapest . It seemed that after ten days of struggle the breakthrough had succeeded.

At this point, on the evening of January 12, the order arrived from the co-

3 Colonel [NdC].

instigator in chief of the Black Army Group to interrupt operations . The officers of the 4th *SS Panzer Corps* looked at each other in disbelief. Feverishly we tried to check the authenticity of the order. The order was authentic"4

The order was most likely a mistake, but it arose from other considerations . Considerations of the commander of the Balck Army Group who feared that a too sudden "fall on Budapest " would lead to nothing other than imprisoning the relief forces so that " instead of an Army Corps in the pocket they would be closed two". Considerations of Hitler who, electrified by the latest successes , was no longer satisfied with the unblocking of Budapest: he now wanted a more far -reaching operation to expel the Russians from the entire right bank of the Danube.

Thus it was that the "northern solution" was replaced by the "southern solution" - the one starting north of the Balaton towards the Danube on flat terrain more suitable for tanks .

In the meantime, however, the situation in Budapest has become increasingly dramatic .

Pest in the first days of January is the scene of fierce fighting. Street by street, house by house - the Russian correspondents made the comparison with Stalingrad - they fought for possession of the city. The suburb of Kijspest and the eastern station area are at the center of furious clashes. Russians and Romanians try to reach the river to divide the bridgehead . The front is now broken up into many islands of resistance entrusted to the initiative of individual defense groups . Meanwhile, the population waits in the cellars, without light , without gas, often even without water. From 24 December to 6 January the overall losses of the Budapest garrison amounted to 5,621 men . The wounded crowd together in the rooms of the Royal Palace .

But the Russians also suffered terrible losses. Romanians often refuse to go into the fire: the Russian way of fighting - regardless of human losses - is not made for them. Entire regiments have to be “re-educated” by the NKVD .

On the night of 17th to 18th January the German and Hungarian forces

Peter Gosztony, *Endkamyf an der Donau,* 1944-1945, Verlag Fritz Molden Wren-Munich-Zurich 1969, p. 127 [NdA I

they finally evacuate Pest to take refuge on the heights of Buda.

Under an infernal artillery fire concentrated on the bridges of the Danube soldiers, officers, women, children, horses, tanks flee towards the still defensible part of the city. Hundreds of them fell , torn apart by enemy grenades , but the exodus continued for hours.
Everything that can run , walk, roll, limp desperately flees towards Buda. Then, at dawn, a sound of thunder woke up the citizens of Budapest in their shelters and the great bridges over the Danube , the pride of the city, were blown up.

In Pest the Soviets found General Billnitzers ' Hungarian artillerymen waiting for them , firing down to the last man on lost positions in the area of the eastern station. They find Szálasi 's boys - the *Nyilas* - still shooting from the rooftops for days .

* * * * *

Pest has fallen, but Buda still resists . Gille is expected, the Wiking Division is expected . "Gille is coming... They're the people from Cherkassy, they 'll make it !": this is the rumor circulating everywhere.
In fact, in the moments of pause in the enemy bombing, the roar of the German offensive can still be heard .

At dawn on January 18 , from the Varpalota-Berhida assembly area , at the northern end of Balaton, the IV *Panzer Corps* once again went on the attack. The *Luftwaffe* is also present: 135 airplanes, not that many, but still many more than the 3 planes present in Normandy on the day of the Allied landing !

The Russian lines between Balaton and Iago Velence are quickly overcome .

Already on the 19th the Germans had traveled 80 kilometers and their tanks crossed the large canal at Kaloz after having broken 4 divisions , an armored corps and a Soviet motorized corps .

On the 20th, the marching tip of the IV SS *Partzerkorps* breaks through the enemy front as if it were made of butter and reaches the Danube at Dunapentele . South from Siofok to Cece and Dunaföldaver - the Russians no longer have anything to throw into the gap that has opened up between Balaton and the Danube . Marshal Tolbuchin himself risks being taken prisoner and Stalin asks whether it is not the case to retreat beyond the Danube .

The Russians have already blown up the great bridges of Dunaföldvar and Dunapentele . The flow of their supplies is blocked on the two residues of Baja and Csepel .

But even on the left wing of the German offensive the Russians were crumbling. After three days of hard fighting, in which the Hungarian volunteers of the *Ne* y Brigade distinguished themselves , *Székesfehérvar* was liberated. The Germans entered at dawn on January 22nd .

On the 23rd the tanks of the *Wiking* Division also reach the Danube at Adony and turn north. We run towards Budapest. But between Lake Velence and the Danube the Russians have already sent large reinforcements. The *Totenkopf,* which could still have passed with momentum on the 20th , lost a day in reorganizing itself and from the 21st it collided around Kapolnàsnyét against growing resistance.

And yet we still advance, beyond the Vali, towards Budapest.

On the 24th , SS Obergruppenführer *Gille ,* commander of the *Wiking,* decides to cross the Vali river north upstream of Baracksa to head towards Val . The localities of Kajàszòszenpeter, Baracksa, Veréb and Val are the scene of fierce fighting. The Russian withdrawal was paid for with very high losses.

The *Waffen SS* and *Wehrmacht* divisions advancing into Hungary in January 1945, the Hungarian units who were still allowed to liberate a part of their homeland, found themselves faced with a frightening spectacle.

Robbery, massacre and rape are law in occupied Hungary. invented by the Russians. An officer of the *Wiking Division recalls:*

"The Soviets had not only deprived the population of every supply of food and drink... They had systematically emptied all homes of those peasants and proletarians for whose "liberation" they had entered Hungary...

In the village of Lepseny the Bolsheviks were not satisfied with robbing the living. They had opened the coffins in the cemetery and stripped the dead of their rings. They had cut off their fingers to take the gold with them. In one of the graves from which a coffin had been torn and in which the bones of the dead had been covered with straw, in the midst of a mountain of broken bottles of wine and vodka , I found a completely torn woman 's stocking and several brassieres . torn...

Hungarian women were defenseless wild animals for the beast Soviet soldiery. A fifty-three year old woman from Polgardi

she told me - alongside her petrified husband - how a Soviet major had raped her and then tied her with a thong to his belt to sleep. The next day she was led on a leash like a beast ...

In Stuhlwissenburg we find a beautiful blonde girl who could have been nineteen years old in a well . People tearfully told us that a Soviet patrol with gendarmerie functions had been established in the house opposite . The sixteen men of the guard had requisitioned two girls , a Hungarian, Ida, and a German from Hungary, Maria, both under the age of twenty.

They had stripped the two girls ' clothes and burned them in the stove. Then they had left them a sort of large vessel for their bodily needs. When one of the soldiers returned, he disposed of the two girls kept in that sort of stable as he pleased .

So, one after the other... On the third day the German girl could n't resist any longer and threw herself into the well to escape that hell.
The Hungarian, after the withdrawal of the Soviets, was saved by the compassionate neighbors and brought home at the end of his life...

In the village of Napkor the drunken Soviet soldiers had amused themselves by killing all the farmers' horses. The remaining women had been raped by force or threats. A 22-year-old girl named Elena who managed to escape was targeted by fire from two Soviet sharpshooters...

Even at Nagyakallo the Soviets had behaved worse than the beasts . The local mental clinic had been their favorite place of entertainment . As the doctors who remained told us , a mob of Russians had raped most of the mentally ill women aged from 16 to 60 ...

However, these were only small episodes of all that Hungary and its miserable inhabitants had to endure. Deportations of thousands and thousands of people — men, women and children, chosen at random — were taking place everywhere in inhumane conditions. The "liberation" of the *puzsta* had begun"5 .

' Erich Kern, *The Great Rush,* Plesse Verlag, Göttingen 1962, pp. 184-186 [NdA].

BUDAPEST, LA FINE

On January 25 , Soviet resistance becomes increasingly stronger . Hundreds of tanks, thousands and thousands of well-armed and well-rested men are rushed against the German armored points in the direction of Buda.

Nonetheless, the 1st *Panzerdivision* attacks again and occupies the town of Baracska. There is fierce fighting in Vareb and Pazmand, north of Lake Velence .

On the 26th the *Totenkopf* Division in the Ercsi area launches the attack northwards towards the Buda airport , Budaörs . The Russians are in trouble. This facilitates a new *assault* by the 1st *Panzerdivision* which crosses the Vali and reaches the first houses of Tordas .

Colonel Philipp is already in telephone contact with SS *Standartenführer* Dörner of the Buda garrison : " *Best* wishes from the bottom of my heart for your success and our liberation! Tens of thousands of wounded await you!

Budapest is there — just 15 kilometers ahead. Nothing seems to be able to stop the push of the liberating troops anymore .

But then , towards evening, a leading wagon receives the following communication : " Back to the starting line! Collection point Veréb!". Massive Russian forces from Lovasberény threaten the overextended tip of the German advance .

Gille grits his teeth. He calls Hitler personally. There is nothing to be done: this time Budapest is definitively abandoned to itself .

Again in the following days , while the Russians — powerfully

strengthened - they were pushing the Germans back from the Danube towards Szeke-sfehérvar, the garrison of Budapest had continued to hope for an imminent release.

By early February , however, it was now clear that this hope had fallen: the noise of the battle had initially faded
and then vanished completely .

The end was approaching. The ration for the fighting troops is now horse broth and 150 grams of bread per day. That of the wounded is just the soup. Medicines and bandages were missing. To make bandages for the thousands of wounded lying in the basement of the Royal Palace, the wonderful brocades and tapestries adorned with the arms of the kings of Hungary were torn to pieces .

Meanwhile, Russian attacks double in intensity. With suicide attacks supported by thousands of *Katiusches* and flamethrowers, the Russians attempted to divide Buda into two sections. At the cost of very bloody losses, the sailors of the Danube fleet attempt to ascend the Gellerthegy.

When Buda 's resistance is now confined to the Castle Hill and the Citadel Hill, and the Russians are close to dividing these bulwarks from each other , Wildenbruch decides to make his escape.

It will begin at 8pm on February 11th.

On the morning of February 11, the German Command received the following communication from Budapest: “Supplies exhausted, last ammunition running out. Choice between capitulation or massacre of the Budapest garrison . I therefore go on the offensive with the last fighting units, the Germans of the *Honveds* or the Arrow Cross. Attack set for 11.2 at nightfall . Pre-go reception in the Szomor-Màriaholm area. If impossible, we will break through the Monti Pilis line . Please reception in the Piliszentlélek area." The German Command tries in vain to communicate with Pfeffer von Wildenbruch: the Budapest garrison radio is no longer transmitting.

Around 8 o'clock the sortie begins. Two assault groups belonging to the 8th *SS Kavalleriendivision* and the 13th *Panzerdivision* march in the lead .

The 22nd *SS Kavalleriendivision* follows . A group of 500 men will advance along underground channels.

There are 23,900 Germans, 20,000 Hungarian soldiers and a thousand Arrow Cross soldiers with their families .

2,000 seriously injured people entrusted to the Papal Nuncio Monsignor Angelo Rotta remain behind . But many wounded prefer to kill themselves rather than fall into the hands of the Russians. Among others, the commanders of the 8th and 22nd Divisions were killed . The latter was injured in the sortie.

The sortie begins.

But the Russians are not at all surprised. Their artillery fires on Castle Hill so as to block the exits.

The attack turns into a massacre. With difficulty, the besieged made their way towards the Buda forest over the bodies of hundreds of dead . They will mostly be tracked down or killed. The command group proceeding along the underground bed of the Ordogÿrok was also surprised by Russian fire .

SS *Standartenfiihrer* Dörner falls into the leading group ; the commander of the Hungarian forces von Hindy is captured with his wife ; Pfeffer von Wildenbruch initially manages to escape but is recaptured the next day . He is brought before Marshal Mali-novsky who welcomes him with these reassuring words: "If I didn't have to answer for your head, you can be sure that I would hang you!".

Only 785 men — out of nearly 50,000 — will reach the German lines.

In Budapest, the Red Army can now impose its "order".

A Greek diplomat who was there says:

"After the operations against Buda were over, the assault troops of the Red Army were sent further west . The rear guard troops remained in the city . They too had their share of looting: a new wave of terror struck ; fires , thefts , rapes filmed in grand style. We learned that the Minister of Sweden, M. Danielson, who was in Buda during the siege , had been taken several dozen kilometers from the capital. The Swedish legation , which had protected the interests of numerous belligerent countries during the war , was sacked . Here a note is inserted , comical so to speak.

In 1941, when Russia was at war with Hungary, the Russian Minister, before leaving , had also entrusted the

Soviet interests to the Minister of Sweden by handing him some boxes of documents, his archives.

In sacking the Swedish Legation the Soviets also plundered their own archives !

The secretary of the Swedish Legation was raped by a certain man number of Cossacks, which earned her a few months in hospital.

Even the doors of the Nunciature were forced and the palace sacked. Anyone who saw the perpetrators of this violence cannot really be surprised. What could the " Nuncio" mean to these people who came from the bottom of the steppe? What value did our concepts of "immunity" and " neutrality" have in their eyes ?

...We saw them setting fire to houses and buildings after having stripped them , destroying for the pleasure of destroying, stealing and then throwing them away immediately afterwards. How difficult it is to penetrate this so refractorily Asian mentality , remote from our Western ideas ... Conte, we said, theft and fire were spectacles of the day; the night was reserved for large - scale rapes .

.. .Many hundreds of French soldiers who had escaped from German prison camps had managed to escape to Hungary , finding refuge and refuge there . were.

When the Soviets arrived they rejoiced at the imminent liberation . They were given the order to gather in Toura, a town about 60 kilometers from Pest. The soldiers went there on foot . The officers, with their wives who had joined them , were allowed to be taken there by truck. Halfway the trucks were stopped and - before the eyes of their husbands - the ladies met Moscow love.

The wife of a Kallay government minister who had had her husband shot by the Nazis for being pro-allied, was raped by a multitude of soldiers despite her advanced age.

The number of these cases was very high and it would be useless to look for the logic or reasons behind it. What did these values represent for beings who were entering a world unknown to them ?

In front of the National Museum of Pest we witnessed this scene: soldiers were replacing the curtain of their truck with

a canvas from the Flemish school. The gilded wooden frame was instead preserved as a precious treasure! " I .

Budapest, which for three months had represented a breakwater against the violence of the red wave , was mourning the loss of 20,000 of its citizens. 33,000 of the city 's 80,000 homes were destroyed.

But the misfortunes were not over: since during the months of siege Malinovsky had always spoken of 180,000 "fascist soldiers ", and now he had to announce 110,000 prisoners, while in reality he had taken 40,000; the problem arose of making the figures balance .

Thus, tens of thousands of citizens of Budapest were picked up off the streets and taken to Siberia as “prisoners of war ”.

' G. A. Skousés, *The Huns and the others* [NDA].

TERROR COMES FROM THE EAST

In the summer of 1944, while the Germans were busy facing the Normandy landings, the Red Army had broken through the defenses of the Eastern front. An immense avalanche of men - not only German soldiers , but Russians who fled with them to the West, national minorities from the USSR, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and, again, herds of cattle, wild animals driven by the war

— suddenly appeared on the borders of East Prussia with the force of a natural cataclysm : “The signs of the catastrophe became perceptible from the last days of June 1944 ; light blows , which barely penetrated consciousness, which made the sun - baked earth tremble, as if from a distant earthquake . Then the streets were suddenly filled with refugees from Lithuania , and masterless herds invaded the fields, the ripe crops, following the same irresistible impulse towards the west. However, it was difficult to understand what was happening, and no one dared to freely express their fears. But as summer approached, and the storks prepared to depart, the precise knowledge of what was about to happen no longer remained hidden for long . Everywhere in the villages one could see men standing still with their eyes fixed on the sky, where the large domestic birds flew away in circles, as if this time was the final farewell. And at the sight of them everyone could feel something the same: “Yes, now you fly away! And then? What will happen to us and our land?”"'.

On 16 October Russian armored forces had pushed into the confines of

Hans von Lehndorff, *The* Russians *are coming* , Milan 1963, Ed. of the Borghese, p. 11 [NDA].

ni of East Prussia by occupying the towns of Nemmersdorf and Goldapp and threatening Gumbinnen. On November 4 , a German counterattack managed to reach the two occupied locations . The picture that was presented showed how the Russians were preparing to "liberate" Germany: the women had been raped , and many nailed alive to the doors of the *farmhouses* , the old men and the boys of the Volks- *sturm* toasted with flamethrowers, newborns crushed with the tracks of wagons. Even 40 French prisoners of war , who perhaps had awaited the Soviets as liberators , had been killed with the others .

In the months of November and December, while fighting in Hungary , the front had solidified on a line which, along the border of East Prussia , reached the course of the Narew, and from there that of the Vistula . To then descend south, towards the Carpathians . Defensive work was in full swing . The entire population was mobilized to dig trenches : *Untemehmen Bcirthold,* "Operation Barthold" had been called by the *Gauleiter* of Silesia, Hanke, in memory of the legendary Margrave Barthold who in 1241 had defeated the Golden Horde , saving the horrors of a Mongol invasion in Europe .

But the Eastern front was a house of cards. The Ardennes offensive (16-26 December) and the offensive in Hungary in the first week of January had diverted the most important armored forces from the Vistula . On January 9 , Guderian went to Hitler in the company of the director of the East Information Sector , Colonel Gehlen . Gehlen estimated Soviet superiority at 9 to 1 for men , 6 to 1 for tanks and 15 to 1 for artillery pieces . _ _ This had unleashed Hitler's anger : his generals did not take into account that the Red Army had also undergone four years of exhausting battles ; the specialists were nothing more than disguised defeatists ; it was - these were the actual words - " the greatest b /oJ that had ever been seen since the time of Genghis Khan"; finally Guderian would have done better to lock up the person who had given him that information in a mental hospital. Guderian was also furious; he replied that in that case he also wanted to be locked up in a mental hospital , and immediately. In any case, it was now too late to reinforce the eastern front .

And - if it was true that the Mongols, 700 years earlier, had reversed course after a skirmish with the Silesian feudal lords - it was also

It is true that Genghis Khan was not an ally of America, which
— since 1942 — it had handed over thousands of trucks, airplanes and cannons to the Red Army .

* * * * *

In reality, along the border of East Prussia and up to Warsaw , the Soviets could deploy 1,700,000 men against
600,000 Germans; 28,000 guns versus 8,000; 3,300 tanks versus 700; 10,000 airplanes versus 1,300. South of Warsaw and up to the slopes of the Carpathians the situation was even more critical :
2,200,000 men against 400,000; 32,000 guns versus 4,000;
6,500 tanks versus 1,136; 4,800 airplanes versus 270.

At one in the morning on January 12, tens of thousands of guns were suddenly unleashed . At dawn, the German lines in front of the Sandomierz bridgehead were crushed . Then I came ahead of the wagons. They crushed the infantry in their foxholes and swept away everything in their path. They bombed from the air and from the ground , the German front melted away in the space of a few hours. Already in the evening a 35 kilometer breach was open . On the 13th, the demolition had widened to 60 kilometers and the armored points of the Red Army were advancing irresistible towards Kielce.

On the 14th, the East Prussian front also started moving: under the hiss of the fighters and the roar of the artillery, the Russian infantrymen stormed the Narew line and the Gumbinnen positions . A vast maneuver was looming , tending to break through towards the mouth of the Vistula on one side, and towards Königsberg on the other: the Fourth Army, which defended the Masurian Lakes , risked being surrounded.

The fall of Warsaw

On January 17 , Warsaw and Czestochowa fell ; further north , the Narew line was broken and Rokossovskij quickly took Modlin and Nasielok .

Panic was beginning to spread . The passage of the Pilica
it turned into disaster. Under the weight of the carriages, the bridge gave way; Of-

Several tanks fell into the river, and only on their wreckage could a new ferry be improvised. On the 19th, the Russians already reached Krakow, Lodz, Kutno, Tomaszow; to the north, the 2nd White Russian Front occupied Melava and the border of East Prussia. On the 20th Tilsit fell while on the left of the Vistula Wloklavek was passed. The Russians passed the Warthe at Ko-lo on Posen.

The first victims of the catastrophe were the Germans of the Warthe-gau. It was that part of Poland annexed by Germany after the victorious campaign of September 1939. One part, Posnania, had belonged to Prussia from 1772 to 1918. In it - despite the Polish searches - something like 200,000 Germans remained . Another 500,000 Germans had arrived in 1940-41. These were minorities coming from Russia and the Baltic countries and for whom the Hitler-Stalin pact left the path of return free . More than a million Poles had been expelled from the Warthegau and the Germans had taken their place. Under the leadership of Greiser, the *Gau-leiter,* the Warthegau had become a model colony. Instead of dirty Polish farmhouses, German farmhouses with freshly painted walls and doorframes ; in place of the traditional Slavic sloppiness, model crops and farms.

Now the Warthegau was the first to suffer the assault destined to destroy 700 years of Germanic labors in the East. Precisely on the evening of February 12, Greiser had given a large reception in his villa in Mariensee. The official speaker was the young Undersecretary for Propaganda, Naumann. There had been talk of new weapons and final victory, and the *Sieg Heil!* they echoed against the crystal chandeliers . But the full gravity of the situation had already become apparent the next day. On the 18th Greiser had driven by car to the vicinity of Lodz to see for himself what was happening. He had first encountered an endless column of refugees fleeing on foot under the snow.

Of the German army , no trace. Instead he saw Soviet tanks advancing like solitary beasts of prey, and he turned back so as not to be captured. On the 20th, after having distributed petrol coupons to the German population, Greiser abandoned Posen . Bormann and the Party would have accused him of cowardice. In Posen , those who had not managed to escape remained. They remained

that 50,000 troops and 2,000 cadets from the local military academy who prepared to make another Alcazar.

In waves - as on the crest of the terrible snowstorms that raged between the Vistula and the Oder in those weeks - the Soviet tanks spread further and further forward. Often, they advanced the bulk of the troop by a hundred or more kilometres . They suddenly appeared in places that were still believed to be safe, rattling ominously and machine-gunning the streets. The Mongol and Siberian assault groups followed on sleds .

They were preceded by the resounding appeals of Stalin 's official propagandist , the fine man of letters Ilya Ehrenburg:

"Soldiers of the Red Army! Kill, kill! Crush the fascist beast in its lair! Take German women as prey , humiliate their racial pride! Kill the fascists, kill them : all fascists are guilty, the born and the unborn ! Comrade Stalin said it : crush the German beast in its lair!".

Incitements aimed at a barbarian troop that did n't need it . Violence against people, especially against women , no longer knew limits . The villages were searched: the members
to the party shot on the spot, the population from 16 to 60 years old used for forced labor, houses, furniture, furnishings broken and set on fire. The plunder of alcohol and the hunting of the female population completed the picture.

There was in that semi-Asian mass a growing amazement at what he encountered on his path: peasants who lived in real houses and not in *isbas* with dung roofs ; workers who had more than one room to live in and whose wives and daughters dressed in silk stockings like movie actresses ; light bulbs, toilets, gramophones, all items which in Moscow were the privilege of the party bonzes, and which in Germany were encountered at every level. The wonder grew when they thought - as they had been assured - of having grown up in the " Soviet paradise", and it turned into hatred when the party propagandists explained to them that if the Germans lived in real houses, with light electric and toilet -*closed,* this depended on the fact that they had plundered and enslaved all the peoples of Europe... Here they are, the human beasts that had sucked the blood of the Russian people : for this reason the German workers

they wore lipstick and looked like movie stars compared to the exhausted and defeated Kolkosians ...

Thus propaganda blew into those primitive minds producing unimaginable effects.

Unstoppable — on snowy slopes, across frozen rivers — with the death ride continued .

Already on January 21st the border of East Prussia had been crossed on all sides ; Allenstein, Tannenberg, Gumbinnen were in the hands of the Russians; On the 22nd Insterburg fell and the exodus from Königsberg took on dramatic aspects. The station was attacked : but only the morning train passed; the others turned back , because the railway to Danzig was already interrupted. The tort-travellers who returned against their will found a Königsberg overflowing with thousands of refugees and struggled to regain possession of their homes.

On the 23rd the Russians - who had crossed the Silesian border at Kreuzburg on the 19th - reached the Oder in front of Brieg and Oppeln for a length of 50 kilometres. Posen was reached; Bromberg fell , and in the evening Russian tanks entered Elbeng . No one was still waiting for them: the cars were circulating freely when they suddenly found themselves machine -gunned. And yet, the Germans reacted promptly : the next morning the Russian avant-garde had to retreat from the city, heading towards the sea instead.

While the front of the 3rd Army cracked under the blows of the enemy , who had already crossed the Pregel and was marching on Königsberg, and that of the 2nd was overwhelmed and pushed back towards the mouth of the Vistula , the 4th Army still guarded the Masurian frontier. The risk of encirclement grew day by day . But Hitler didn't want to hear talk of disengagement: for some time every proposal of retreat had made him suspicious, and he could no longer conceive of anything other than resistance on the ground, down to the last man and the last cartridge .

Thus, the commander of the 4th Army, Hossbach , decided to disobey and force the passage towards west Danzig. The attack began on the 26th, when the Russians had already reached the sea near Tolkemit, and came up against growing resistance. There is fierce fighting near Mehlsack and Wormidt ; but now it was too late to pass. On January 30 , Hitler dismissed Hossbach; the 4th Army

he continued to fight with his back resting on the Frisches Haff, protecting the exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

*****

The second half of January was characterized by continuous snowstorms . The thermometer dropped to 20 degrees below zero and the wind raged with Siberian rigors. It was in these days and under these conditions that the exodus of 1,300,000 of the 2,300,000 inhabitants of East Prussia took place . They crammed the streets, on foot or on carts, dragging their last belongings with them and sowing the path with the dead . The old, the sick, and children perished from fatigue and freezing : a hole in the snow was enough to cover them.

Ironically, this exodus was not directed by Germans - long time soldiers on all fronts - but by Belgians and French taken prisoner in 1940 and assigned to help the farmers. Peasants themselves , they had grown fond of the land they cultivated and the families that hosted them and now, instead of running to meet the "liberators ", they brought to safety the wives of those who had captured them five years earlier.

Thus, all of East Prussia set out on the march, followed by an enemy who had revealed himself capable of any atrocity, and whose very name meant fear . He set out with long lines of carriages , which barely proceeded in the storm, while the fire of the fires indicated where Chernyakovsky and Rokossovsky had arrived. Sometimes, the wagons were faster than the caravans: they suddenly emerged , ramming the trailers and the animals and crushing the women and children under their tracks. Then we witnessed singular scenes : the French prisoners held machine guns and supported the last, disbanded patrol of the *Wehrmacht.*

The road to Danzig was now closed. The sea route remained .

It in East Prussia is accessed by two lagoons, the Frisches and the Kurisches Haff, closed by two long, thin strips of land. Thus , hundreds of thousands of people faced the frozen sea towards the open sea:

"Hundreds of thousands of refugees are looking for an exit , lashed by a terrible snowstorm . They try to reach Braunsberg and Heiligenbeil, the only points from where the

the ice surface to venture onto the frozen gulf. But the roads have become almost impassable. The heavy German armored vehicles still heading towards the front have broken through and upset them. Dead animals rot in the ditches , the farm animals that the refugees had tried to bring with them and which in the end they were forced to abandon: cattle, sheep , pigs. The most disparate objects cover the sides of the streets: we had to get rid of them as the suffering increased. You pass through villages where everything has been abandoned: the houses, the animals, the furniture, the wheat and oats from the harvest.
Death struck everything , with one blow.

When the Russian encirclement was completed, the immense column of refugees heading towards the Vistula in the hope of crossing it had to turn around and fall back towards the sea...

From all directions waves of refugees converge on the two points on the coast from where you can reach the frozen sea.

. A specific order from the police obliges the owners of cars and vehicles to get rid of all the goods they try to take with them, to make room instead for the women and children who are waiting . Thus, on the banks of the lagoon, masses of mattresses , linen , household objects and food are piled up. Alongside the column of vehicles, endless lines of pedestrians march day and night. The procession of these myriads of black ants moves on the white ice in the livid day: women pushing children's prams, men loaded with parcels , postal and railway employees still in uniform -

symbols of a society broken in the fire of war. At the end of January the barometer dropped to twenty- five degrees below zero . An eyewitness reports that halfway , on the ice, a woman noticed that two of her four children had frozen to death in the pram she was pushing . However, he continued on his sinister path. Upon arrival, the other two children had also frozen to death...

We do n't care about those who die on the sidelines , among the corpses of men and animals . 11 food is missing, leftovers are collected, any leftover. In the places where the crowds are waiting to cross the lagoon, the health situation becomes alarming. Russian planes fire on the ice with on-board weapons or drop

bombs. To reduce the risk, the authorities order a certain distance to be maintained between vehicle and vehicle: this is a ridiculous measure in that saraband of death."

When Konev 's wagons appeared on the borders of Silesia, something like a million people lived in Breslau . The population , of 625,000 souls, had increased by many hundreds of thousands of refugees who had abandoned their homes in western Germany , too exposed to American air raids.

it is.

On the 19th the Russians quickly crossed the borders of the old Prussian province, heading towards the Oder. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands of refugees appeared in Wroclaw; they dragged their last possessions in absurd handcarts and wore misery and terror on their faces . The exodus from the city took on catastrophic aspects. Here too , the trains were attacked . Gauleiter Hanke - determined to entrench himself in *the* city - personally directed the eviction of the civilian population. Party buses and trucks took women and children to the Protectorate of Bohemia. But they weren't even remotely enough to transport the entire mass .

in.

From January 20th to January 21st, loudspeakers shouted in the streets: " Women and children leave the city on foot, in the direction of Oppe - raukanth!".

That night, the temperature dropped to 20 degrees below zero. The snow was half a meter deep . The Oder appeared covered by a thick blanket of ice and a cutting wind swept the plain. The women 's march in Wroclaw turned into a death march . There were thousands of cases of frostbite . Almost all of the children aged three or under died there and were buried under the snow, on the side of the road.

Even in Königsberg there was an air of imminent end. Once the road to Danzig had been cut off, the last escape was the train that led to Pillau, a small port at the mouth of the Frisches Haff from where the ships loaded with refugees departed. The rush for the last train to Pill-lau turned into tragedy. Yet, those who lost it were luckier.

2Bernard George, The *Red Wave ,* Rome 1969, Ed. Volpe [NdA].

A month later, during a sortie, it was found with all its passengers by the defenders of Königsberg. He had n't gotten very far. Just a few kilometers further . The corpses of the women , with their clothes opened with a dagger or bayonet, revealed that here too what had occurred in all places in eastern Germany had been repeated .

THE GREAT LEAK

At the end of January, the red wave seemed unstoppable. For two weeks the Soviet tanks had been racing towards the west without stopping and it seemed that they would never stop again . Posen was surrounded, Bromberg had fallen on the 23rd, Königsberg and what remained of East Prussia cut off from the rest of Germany .

In the last week of January the Russians penetrated Upper Silesia, occupying Oppeln on the 24th, Gleiwitz on the 25th, Hindenburg on the 26th, Beuthen and Konigshütte on the 28th. After the paralysis of the Ruhr - now isolated by bombing — Upper Silesia was the last industrial reserve of the *Reich.* The order was not to move: the miners were still at work and the factories were producing at full capacity for the " final victory" when Konev 's tanks arrived . The entire population was surprised and no one escaped revenge .

Among those who entered Upper Silesia with Russian troops was the ex-German soldier Zahn. He had been taken prisoner in Stalingrad and had agreed to collaborate with Paulus 's " Free Germany " committee . However, he was not prepared to bear seeing the way in which the Russians were preparing to "liberate" Germany.
Here's what he said after managing to escape :

"Not long after our entry into the first city of First Silesia, into the Soviet command posts, in Beuthen — and then in other places — I read this poster for the first time : "All male inhabitants from sixteen to sixty-year-olds must report to the police station to be employed for rear -line work..". While in the territories towards the Neisse of Glatz the population

had largely been evacuated, or - in panic - had fled, the entire population of Upper Silesia had remained on site. The men who — not being aware of the announcement
— they didn't show up, they were herded in with rifle butts by the Russians. In their raids, these did not pay attention to documents , but tried to round up as many people as possible ; consequently they didn't even care about age and also took boys as young as ten or eleven and as old as eighty. They were hastily registered and sent off into the unknown. Many of these civilians passionately tried to explain that they were old German communist militants : they were not even listened to. I asked a Soviet officer where those people were sent . He replied , a little embarrassed , that those men had to knock down anti-tank obstacles and bury the dead. I found the same posters in Gleiwitz, Oppeln, Brieg, and I soon realized that, by raiding all the male civilians , a pre-established plan of forced deportation of the working population in Russia was being carried out .

In some contrast to this plan, for which the commands military personnel thus possessed clear directives, was the unbridled and savage behavior of the Russian soldiers and officers towards the people and property of the remaining population. It seemed as if the devil himself had broken into Upper Silesia. With the Soviet armies imippe - but seriously , and not only in the *clichés* of Nazi propaganda - " Asian barbarism". From January until April , looting , rape , violence and killings raged. Every German was game that could be freely hunted ; every German asset is a prey of war... It is difficult to even have a faint idea of what the hordes of Cal-mucchi, Tartars, Caucasians, rampaging Siberians are like . Every fantasy always remains below reality ...

Denazification was carried out radically . As soon as the men of a town were crowded together, the political commissars arrived and inquired about the remaining fascists . It was enough for the first screening to reveal that one of those arrested was also a simple trustee of the NSDAP, for him - even on the basis of mere suspicions - to be shot. Then followed a subsequent search in shelters and work camps , with all sorts of harassment and violence . In the meantime , even women and children , without any

Given their physical conditions, they were assigned to the heaviest jobs , removing mines , shoveling rubble , and burying corpses in mass graves . But more terrible than any suffering for women, girls and girls was having to be continually raped . The scenes that occurred touched the limits of violence and dementia , so that those who did not witness them might believe them to be absurd inventions. In Schliedow - west of Oppeln - I saw twenty soldiers queuing in front of the corpse of a woman who was certainly in her sixties , and who had been raped until she died . The infantrymen of the Red Army stood in line writhing and shouting , waiting their turn to satisfy their bestial desires on that lifeless body ... " .

qqqp

In the wake of the snowstorms that raged throughout eastern Germany , Zukov 's armored divisions rushed past the old German fortifications from the Weimar Republic era , reaching eastern Brandenburg . On January 31st they were in Landsberg, on February 1st in Schwerin and on the 2nd they reached the Oder between Kiistrin and Frankfurt. In 4 weeks they had traveled 400 kilometres. Berlin was now only 80 kilometers away . _

Passing over the frozen river , the Russians also managed to establish a bridgehead on the left bank . The German capital was directly threatened by it . Since anti -tank weapons were lacking , Berlin 's own anti - aircraft guns were sent to the river . The Russians could have pushed further forward, but they were now tired , and Pomerania and Silesia were still mostly in German hands .

They therefore continued to comb Silesia . On 6 February they forced the Oder upstream from Breslau, seizing Ohlau , Brieg and Grottkau. On the 7th they crossed the river downstream , taking Liegnitz Len, Haynau and Steinau. On the 10th they reached the Bober between Bunzlau and Sottau . The circle was closing around Wroclaw. On the 15th the capital of Silesia - a beacon of medieval German colonization and Germanic baroque - was completely surrounded. Of its 500,000 inhabitants, 200,000 remained . Gauleiter Hanke remained in the city with 50,000 defenders, determined to make an enterprise

bile bulwark. Wroclaw will open its doors only on May 8th, one day after the end of hostilities in Europe.

By mid-February, Soviet pressure in Silesia had eased made so threatening that it endangered Saxony itself. Glogau had been besieged since the 13th and the Russians were trying to break through in the direction of the Lusatian Neisse . But Schömer - the iron man of the German Eastern Front - went on the counterattack. On 18 February German units, laboriously gathered together, moved from the area in front of Guben , Forst and Görlitz. On the 19th Sorau, Somefeld and Sagan were reconquered in an advance whose objective should have been the unblocking of Glogau. Everywhere, scenes of destruction and terror. Villages set on fire, German civilians liquidated with a blow to the back of the head, women and children emerging from the woods and barns where they had hidden for days.

In those first weeks of February there was also fighting in the Netze region and on the lower course of the Vistula. The Russians tried to crumble the Pomeranian "wall" and occupied Snwalde and Barwalde; on the 9th Elbing fell, despite the supporting fire of the two cruisers *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer.* On the 14th the Russians captured the Schneidemühl porcupine. Meanwhile, the Posen tragedy.

decided In Posen the two thousand cadets of the local I academy were to make the city a second Alcazar. They were commanded by Colonel Gonell , a decorated member of the Order of the Blood and a fervent national-socialist. But already on January 27 the Russians had managed to penetrate the southwestern part of the city. Thus the first Germans, in the cellars, suddenly saw the sights of the Russians in front of them. They were rounded up, plundered, beaten, pushed into the streets and handed over as slaves to the Poles. The fighting in the city had become increasingly fierce. The cadets revived the uncertain fronts of the territorials and airmen. An invitation to capitulate was burned by the commander of a German unit under the eyes of the bearer. The stories of those who escaped Russian captivity destroyed any hope of finding clemency on the other side. From the Citadel, in German hands, you could see the Castle, with the wounded abandoned by the Russians who were shooting to open a passage in the overcrowded rooms and the dead from the narrow windows . As the days passed, the throwing unblocked hope became increasingly tenuous . Despite the promises of

Himmler - appointed Chief of Army Group Vistula - already on 16 February Gonell authorized a first sortie. On February 22 Go-nell gave a new general sortie permit , then went to his *Bunker* and stuck a ball in his head. Left alone, General Mattern capitulated with the remnants of the garrison. German prisoners were led around while Polish mobs pelted them with stones and clubs. 1 lightly wounded were immediately eliminated. The most serious , in the old ruined fortress , awaited their fate with fear. They certainly didn't imagine the jet of flamethrowers that was used to sweep them away.

* * * * *

Millions of Germans fled along the roads of Silesia and Pomerania. They clung to the shreds of divisions spared by the Russian offensive. They fled on wagons, in carriages, or even on foot , forming a continuous line of human ants under the eye of enemy fighters.

The incredible ferocity of the Red Army emptied the country even before its arrival. Stalin knew what he was doing. At Yalta, on 6 February, Churchill , who objected that it was impossible to cede to Poland a territory inhabited by 10 million Germans at the risk of "choking the Polish goose with too much German food", replied: "This is not a problem. The Germans leave on their own when my troops arrive." In fact, about two-thirds of the German population living beyond the Oder-Neisse abandoned their homes when the Russians arrived.

The remaining third experienced firsthand what Bolshevism represented in semi-Asian souls. He saw the ruin of 700 years of German colonization in the East and the borders of Asia advanced into the heart of Europe. The drama of the German who sabotaged Hitler 's orders to mitigate the fate of the Slavic peoples was expressed by Thorwald in the words of Lieutenant Scholtis to his old liberal professor:

"We were wrong. Hitler was right, Koch was right, those who wanted to annihilate, eradicate, exterminate were right ... If I had left no trace of life , they wouldn't be here and they couldn't rape, murder, deport!

...Did you see the infants killed in Neuteich? And the women who could no longer carry themselves because they had been raped twenty or forty times in one night ? And the twelve- year -old girls whose ravaged bodies were bleeding? No, you didn't see anything, anything! Nor can you see why your horrible stupidity has changed into consciousness . And your stupidity is the stupidity of the West which happily continues to wage war on us and feels profoundly moral because it took the field against the Hitlerian regime "unworthy of humanity" ...

I feel like spitting when I listen to Radio London and Radio New York who want to teach us about humanity and law. Churchill must come here , Roosevelt must come here !

...There is nothing left to do... in the East we are a conquered people . The Bolsheviks will advance further, without our being able to prevent it. Why then should we continue to fight? For Europe, for the others who - God is witness - write our faults in gigantic letters and the faults of the Russians in letters so tiny that they ca n't even be read ? No! Total ruin is better . It is then better to simply throw ourselves into the arms of the hell that advances from the East and say: do with us what you want. But at least let us march with you against the West. We want to take revenge on those who persist in not wanting to understand that we are not only fighting for us but also for them!"'.

The miserable convoys dragging from East Germany found peace only beyond the Oder and the Neisse. Here they began to feel safe from the Russians, and they stopped. Hundreds of thousands of Silesian refugees had thus flocked to Dresden. The overloaded trains crowded into the station. The refugees had invaded not only the city, but the surrounding meadows. No fewer than 700,000 people packed into Dresden on 13 February 1945.

The first planes appeared between 9pm and 10pm and between 10.09pm and 10.50pm . They came from southern Holland and dropped 3,000 explosive bombs and 400,000 incendiary bombs. The anti-aircraft unit had been sent to the Oder front to finally oppose the Soviet formations with weapons suitable for piercing armor . Thus, the Allied bombers had an easy job; when re-

' Jürgen Thorwald, *large F8•*, Sansoni, Florence 1964, p. 247.

they left, Dresden was enveloped in an immense yellow-red phosphorescence. Entire neighborhoods had simply been obliterated.

Rescue teams rushed from Berlin, Leipzig and Halle onto the frozen highway. They had been living among the bombings for years , but what they saw filled them with new horror. No sooner had they got to work than successive waves of bornbardiers appeared - at 1.22am . It was enough for them to fill in the squares that remained dark amidst the fires. They dropped another 5,000 explosive bombs and 200,000 incendiary bombs . This time, the rescue teams were also sucked into the fire. The fire was so strong that it engulfed people hundreds of meters away . The corpses of those who had thrown themselves into the water with their clothes on fire were floating in the fire tanks .

A third attack, at midday on February 14 , completed the job. Another 2,000 bombs and 50,000 incendiary bombs fell.
When everything was finished, entire areas of the city were inaccessible due to the amount of rubble. Tens of thousands of people actually disappeared. Soon, I got used to counting the dead based on the heads that were found; we could n't talk about real corpses . Many were burned in a fire in the center of the city. 65 % were no longer identifiable. Until April, burial was given to
29,000 dead, but just as many remained under the rubble.

* * * * *

At the end of February, Soviet pressure against the " Pomeranian Wall " increased day by day . In vain Himmler had called hastily formed SS units such as the French *Charlemagne* to that front . They were divisions without weapons and without petrol , thrown towards the enemy like twigs in his path. On the 28th Neustettin fell and Rokossovsky began to press towards Köslin. For his own sake, Zhukov crossed the Ihna on March 1st aiming for Stargard. On March 3rd the Russians entered Rummelsburg , on the 5th they captured Stargard, Naugard and Köslin. The entire Pomeranian front collapsed like a house of cards and already on the 6th the Russians took Kamm, towards the mouth of the Oder, and laid siege to Kolberg.
In Kolberg there were a hundred thousand people crowded together who were being evacuated by Navy vehicles . On the 9th Stolp fell . I Te-

Desks now held only a bridgehead on the right bank of the Oder in the localities of Gollnow and Altdamm. It served the tens of thousands of refugees and as a bulwark of Stettin.

Nearly 900,000 people had fled Pomerania , but 1,000,000 remained at the mercy of the Russians. They too experienced looting , rape and deportation.

The wife of the doctor Dr. Mackow says:

"In the last days of February refugees came from all the streets saying that the Pomeranian front had collapsed and nothing could hold the Russians back. The authorities instead guaranteed that the front would be held. Soon the streets became clogged. Every house was packed with exhausted people, especially women and children. On March 1, Russian troops arrived in our village. What happened that night was frightening. Many men who wanted to protect their wives and daughters were killed. Every house was ransacked, every woman, from twelve-year-olds to gray-haired old women, was raped. The following day we found some young mothers who had hanged themselves together with their daughters because they could no longer bear such a massacre . The terror had stiffened us to the point of no longer finding tears but rather thinking : they had finally stopped suffering. Other troops poured into our Oder villages to steal and rape. Many of our acquaintances fled to lonely places or forests, but they were always found . A young teacher from the village of Kriescht, hiding in the forest, was found by the soldiers. Completely naked, she was pushed back onto the street, where many soldiers, one after another, abused her. Hiding in snowy ditches and swamps, crawling with his hands and feet, he reached our village in an unrecognizable condition... Seven days after the Russians entered, we had to evacuate the village in ten minutes. We could n't cry , only the children screamed. We turned back one last time to look at our church and our hill... On March 9th I was loaded onto a truck together with other women. We had to build runways for airplanes to take off and break stones in the rain and snow from 6 in the morning to 9 at night...

Completely exhausted, I finally collapsed. I was sent back to the village . It lasted for several days before I could reach my goal.

ta because every now and then I had to stop. When I finally reached the village where I had last been with my husband, other women told me that in the meantime they had taken away the men aged 15 to
60 years. Of these 2,000 men we never saw a single one again, nor did we ever know anything precise about their fate."

The fate of the other occupied German regions was no different .
Even in Silesia, at the beginning of March Schörner 's troops had been pushed back beyond the Neisse. The hilly strip along the edges of the Sudeten Mountains , from Görlitz to Schweidnitz to Ratibor, remained in German hands. Of 4,718,000 Silesians, only one and a half million remained. The others, a gray and shapeless mass , crowded onto the exit routes .

* * * * *

On March 18 Kolberg fell. Its epic defense had lasted two weeks and had allowed 70,000 refugees to board and escape.

At the same time, the Russians set about eliminating the areas of German resistance at the mouth of the Vistula. Gotenhafen fell on the 19th. Gdansk, invested on the 24th , will resist until March 30th . One of the most important naval bases of the *Reich* fell with it , and the Russians captured 45 submarines there. The German population was beaten, stripped and exposed to the ridicule of the mob that came from within Poland. Here too, as in Posen , the Polish communist militia appeared and worked to blow up a good part of the buildings still standing . The looting and deportations completed the picture. Of the 420,000 citizens, only about 200,000 remained.

At this point the Russians turned their attention to Königsberg, which had been holding out since the end of January. On April 6, hundreds of batteries and thousands of mortars began firing on the city. The air force also bombed relentlessly . Then, General Vasilyevsky's troops went on the attack . The weak German forces were soon disorganized; Juditten and Metgehen once again fell into enemy hands and contact with the port of Pillau , the last window to freedom, was definitively lost .

On April 7 , the Russians advanced from Ponarth towards Central Station.

between. On the 8th the city , attacked from the south and the east, was close to collapse. On the 9th — in a chaotic and twilight atmosphere — the surrender took place . Many were against it . The German parliamentarians with the white flag were fired upon by shots coming from their ranks . Finally, General Lasch signed. The Russians killed the wounded and sent the others towards Siberia . The SS remained , who locked themselves in the castle and allowed themselves to be killed. Königsberg was also dying. A witness writes:

"Through the Közsgarter Markt, towards the Castle, a gigantic snake of troops winds their way in and we come across them .
I pinch my side hard to make sure that all this is reality and not a dream. Königsberg 1945, I say to myself several times. No one had thought before about this good, ancient, noble city, which was never considered in its value; it was still just waiting for this grandiose drama to extinguish itself!...

We swim in the middle of a river of lava that spreads across the earth from a baleful star ... Now, among flaming rubble, a confused, shouting crowd winds along the road , without beginning or end . Is it really true, today, on this day? Isn't it two thousand, ten thousand years ago, or just as later? Time is double, triple, at this moment . It is not possible to describe everything that comes forward, what men, what animals, what vehicles. I only know one thing : this is the victory, the victory as it must appear in the year 1945. The horrid and grotesque details of which the picture is made appear to me as actions and reactions of a dynamic complex . I wonder in surprise whether Königsberg has always been located in the heart of Asia, so that the gray lava could spread like that"2 .

Only 100,000 of its 300,000 inhabitants remained in Königsberg on 9 April 1945. Two years later , deportations , epidemics and hunger had reduced them to 24,000. Königsberg was renamed "Kaliningrad ". The fascinating East German city that had given birth to Kant and spread Germanic culture to the Baltic was repopulated with populations from Central Asia.

Of the ten million Germans who in 1939 lived east of the Oder-Neisse line in the eastern provinces of the *Reich* and in the

2 Hans von Lehndorff, *The* Russians *are coming* , Ed. del Borghese, Milan 1963 [NdA].

to Free of Danzig, about six million had fled before the Russians . There remained four million who would have been expelled between 1945 and 1948. From both figures must be deducted two million killed and disappeared , who , together with a million Germans from Bohemia and the Balkans lost along the way , bring the blood price paid by the German people in the fall of the Red Army to three million deaths3 .

This rough estimate , however, only takes into account the civilian population [NdC].

THE BATTLE OF BERLIN

With the Russians on the Oder, Berlin became a front-line city. In the sixth year of the war the capital of the *Reich* is a shadow of its former self.
More than a third of the houses are destroyed and of its 4,300,000 inhabitants only 2,500,000 remain , of which two million are women. The men are at the front. There remain old men and boys included in the *Volkssturm or* the *Hitlerjugend* and mobilized for the last defence.

Since January, a million refugees have flowed into that lunar landscape of craters which , a few years earlier, hosted the elegant life of a large metropolis. A trench has been dug around Berlin ; we work feverishly to build barriers with tram cars.

But it's all stuff that a T-34 blows away with a cannon shot. The Berliners, with that black irony that had always characterized the population of one of the most savvy capitals of Europe, said that the Russians would have taken exactly one hour and two minutes to pass them: an hour of holding their stomachs . from laughing, and two minutes to get over it. It was also said : "Enjoy the war: peace will be terrible". The number of suicides was growing day by day . Everyone knew what had happened in Silesia and Pomerania , and to many it must have seemed more convenient to poison oneself in one's own home than to be killed by a drunken Kalmuk after seeing one's wife or daughter being raped .

And yet, the morale of the young people was very high. Tempered in body and soul by the harsh school of National Socialism, they had an unshakable faith in Hitler and the regime. They were the younger brothers of the heroes of Narvik and Crete, of Stalingrad and El-Ala-

mein, and they aspired to take his place. For years the boys had been employed in the anti-aircraft and as firefighters. For years they had fought daily against the incursions of a thousand, three thousand, ten thousand enemy planes. It was necessary to extract the wounded from the rubble, climb onto the burning houses, remove incendiary fragments . It was n't yet war , but sometimes it was worse.

Now they learned to use the *Panzerfaust,* the " armored fist" that destroys a tank at a distance of fifty meters. Special brigades of very young "tank hunters " , on bicycles and with *Panzerfausts slung* over their shoulders, were already circulating on the Oder front. Already on 2 February the Russians had reached the Oder at Kiistrin. Throughout February and March they had raided Silesia and Pomerania . Now they prepared for the final leap. On the other hand, on March 23 the Americans had crossed the Rhine and the first half of April had seen them spread into the heart of Germany. The curtain was about to open on the last act of war.

On April 16, 1945, at 4 in the morning, a gigantic roar deafened the populations of the Oder valley. 22,000 guns — the most powerful artillery concentration of World War II — they fired on the German lines, pulverizing pillboxes, trenches and barriers, while a hot wind blew towards the west and in the most distant cities the windows shook. A few hours later, two million Soviet soldiers began to cross the Oder in a state of exceptional animation:

"Screaming and shouting like savages, the Russians advanced on the eastern bank of the Oder. Caught in a sort of frenzy, they didn't even want to wait for the boats and the bridges. Stunned, Golbov saw soldiers diving in fully equipped and starting to swim across the river . Others waded into the river clinging to empty petrol cans, boards , pieces of wood , tree trunks, in short , anything that floated . It was a fantastic sight. Golbov compared it to an immense army of ants crossing the water on leaves and blades of grass"'.

Behind them came 6,000 tanks and thousands of airplanes. The last eastern front of the *Wehrmacht* was about to definitively collapse .

' C. Ryan, *The Last Battle,* p. 285 [Editor's note].

On the 17th , the infantrymen of General Weidling 's 56th Corps again managed to stop the Soviets in front of the Seelow heights , near Kiistrin . But between Guben and Forst, in the southern sector of the offensive, the breakthrough appeared irreparable. While Konev forded the Spree north of Cottbus and Zukov's vanguard pressed between Kiistrin and Eberswalde , a proclamation from Hitler was issued . In it it was said that "the Bolsheviks will suffer the ancient fate of Asia and will bleed to death in front of the capital of the *Reich",* and that "if in the next few days every soldier of the Oder does his duty , the last assault of the 'Asia will fall apart'.

But by the 18th the Seelow Heights had been conquered . The tracks Russian tanks rattled on Reichstrasse 1 - which runs from Warsaw to Berlin and ends on Frankfurter Allee - and on Reichstrasse 158 , which from Bad Freienwald, through Weissensee, ends on A1exanderp1atz.

On the 19th, the first tanks were spotted on the highway south of Berlin, while from the east and north-east the noise of the battle approached the outskirts of the city. That evening the Berliners heard Goebbels ' voice celebrating Hitler 's birthday on the radio for the last time :

"In this phase of the war in which one might think that once again , perhaps for the last time, the powers of hatred and separation are attacking our front from the east and the west , I am speaking to you about the *Fiihrer* as well as from 1933 onwards I have always spoken about him to the German people on the evening of the eve of April 20th . I can only tell you that this era, in all its dark and painful grandeur , has found in the Fiihrer *its* only worthy representative...

Today we can defame and revile him, shamefully slander his name, but one day we will see this attitude again and many will regret it bitterly. He is the fulcrum of the resistance against the collapse of a world ...

Let us look to him with hope and unshakable faith . .. Germany is the land of loyalty . He will celebrate his greatest triumph in danger . Speaking of these days , history will never be able to say that the people have abandoned their leader or the leader has abandoned his people . And this is the victory!".

While Goebbels ' words and the echo of the last fanfare dispersed into the night, the lights of the fires and the sound of the bells

bread and butter denounced the extent of the Soviet advance. The ancient cities of the March of Brandenburg burned like torches all around Berlin .

The next day, April 20 , the day of his fifty-sixth birthday , Hitler rose into the sunlight for the last time . For months we had been living in the *Bunker* under the Chancellery, in the circle of our closest collaborators, avoiding any contact with the outside world and with the destroyed city . Waiting for him - lined up in the courtyard - were some very young people, some almost children, who had distinguished themselves for acts of valor on the Oder front . Hitler reviewed them one by one , gave a short speech , and then withdrew. For a few hours he didn't want to talk to anyone anymore. Perhaps the sight of those boys must have disturbed the man who had reviewed the most formidable armies in the world.

In the afternoon - the Russians were already about to invest the first suburbs - the leaders of the Third Reich came to wish him well and beg him to abandon Berlin. Hitler was adamant: however, he allowed Himmler and von Ribbentrop to go north and Göring to Bavaria. He then asked if steps had been taken to have his proclamation printed for the population of Berlin. "What proclamation?", those present asked : "The *Führer* is in Berlin. The *Führer* remains in Berlin . The *Führer* will defend Berlin until his last breath." Despite their protests this was Hitler 's last word . Then the official atmosphere dissolved. Eva Braun — who had arrived on one of the last trains from Munich, and had refused to go back — organized a small entertainment. We drank *champagne* and even listened to a record: *Blutrote Rosen erzählen dir vom Glück*[2] .

While the secretaries and officers of the escort danced, Hitler lingered until dawn over the military papers. The situation was deteriorating hour by hour. The Soviet pincer was increasingly tightening around the capital of the *Reich.* The only theoretical possibility would have been to cut these branches while they were still thin. Hitler 's finger searched, rustling on the paper, until — north of Berlin — found the Steiner Army. Steiner was perhaps the best of the *Waffen SS* generals , the defender of Narwa, the idol of the foreign SS volunteers . He was an energetic, capable man: Hitler clung to the hope that Steiner could attack from

2 "Rose rosso-sangue ti raecontano della felicita" [NdC].

north the northern branch of the Soviet outflanking maneuver. In the south, the Busse Army would arrive and was retreating from Frankfurt. In this illusion, Hitler went to sleep.

* * * * *

On the morning of the 21st the city was now in full agony. There was no gas , no water, no electricity. The roar of the cannon was approaching with the *Panzerfaust.*

At 11am , with the shutters closed and candlelight , they gathered for the last time the direction of the Ministry of Propaganda. Goebbels entered, deathly pale, with supernatural excitement in his eyes . For the first time he admitted that all was lost. But Accusò didn't say it : he shouted it, with anger, anger, with sarcasm. the betrayal of the generals, the defeatism of with the people who raised white flags, the garrisons who capitulated. Hans Fritzsche , the well-known radio commentator, stood up to counter him.

He said that if it was true that there was much treason, the German people could not be accused in this way - en bloc . Recklessly: Goebbels was now out of his mind. The German people - he began to shout - were unworthy of National Socialism: a people who fled in the face of an enemy who raped their women did not deserve to survive; he personally had enough of the German people. And he concluded verbatim: "We did not force you , just as we did not force the German people. Did he elect us ? Why did you collaborate with us, my brave men? Now your little necks will be cut! But when we disappear, the world will tremble!". And he went out slamming the door.

When the meeting participants went outside, the first shells fell on the city. The eastern and southern suburbs were fully invested and the enemy 's armored vanguards were in Köpenick and on the Teltowkanal. Until late at night Hitler waited for news from Steiner. Only alarming communications came from the places north -west of Berlin where the Russians had passed Oranienburg and Birkenwerder and were now aiming for Potsdam.

On day 22 - during the afternoon conference - Jodl he began cautiously by talking about some minor successes in Saxony.

Hitler snapped at him : "Spare me the trifles, Jodl,
and instead tell me where Steiner is!". Then the truth came out :
Steiner, who himself was hit by hundreds of enemy tanks and was
struggling to hold his front , had judged any diversion in the direction of
Berlin to be absurd . Steiner had disobeyed , and the thread to which
Hitler had clung for the last two days was falling . That was a particularly
difficult moment for Hitler to overcome. He asked the bystanders to
come out, with the exception of Keitel, Jodl, Bormann, Krebs and
Burgdorf. Then he exploded in a fury of incredible violence against
everything and everyone . Suddenly , his storm ceased: for the first
time the bystanders heard him speak in a tired , plaintive voice ; he had
tears in his eyes. They heard Hitler 's voice admitting for the first time
that the war was lost, that all was lost and that, as for himself , he would
remain in Berlin, fight with Berlin and die in Berlin .

While those present were trying to console him, Goebbels arrived,
who moved to the *Bunker* with his wife and children.

As *Gauleiter* of Berlin, as the man who fifteen years earlier had
conquered Berlin for National Socialism, Goebbels felt intimately linked
to the capital. Goebbels supported Hitler in his determination to remain
in Berlin . His eloquence, his indomitable spirit enclosed in that small
and almost deforine body dictated to him new words of faith. Hitler
seemed revived by Goebbels' eloquence: his trembling hand resumed
moving over the map : Jodl would go to Steiner, Keitel to Wenck, who
commanded an army employed against the Americans on the Elbe.

They would convince them to converge on Berlin from the north and
west . On that date, Busse would also arrive with his Army which was
retreating from Frankfurt of the Oder amidst the armored masses of the
enemy. His name was Naumann, the young Undersecretary for
Propaganda , and proclamations and leaflets were commissioned from the printers.
Once that suffocating Sunday, which seemed to mark the deadlock in
Berlin's defense , was over, the city regained new life.

* * * * *

11 that April 22nd , when everything seemed to have to collapse at
any moment , the city was hit from all sides . The Russians

they had already penetrated the suburbs and the first fighting broke out on the outskirts.

On the morning of the 23rd, the Berliners saw the first German soldiers pouring into the city. They came from the Oder front; they had been fighting day and night for a week and had the Russians on their tail. Era General Weidling 's 56th Corps : the 20th *Hanseatische Panzergrenadierdivision* , the 18th *Pailzergrenadierdivision, the Panzerdivision Müncheberg* and the *SS Panzergrenadierdivisioil Nordland* - the latter made up largely of Scandinavian volunteers . 300 Frenchmen - survivors of the SS *Charlemagne* Division - also reached Berlin in those hours. More than divisions, they were shreds of divisions, but they were still the first regular soldiers who flocked to the city, and they gave new heart to the population.

In truth, Weidling simply wanted to pass through the outskirts of Berlin and retreat further back. A fight in the city did not appeal to him ; anything but. But Hitler had him called and ordered him to deploy his troops in defense of Berlin. No objection was possible. So, by chance, the 56th Corps - or what was left of it - took on the burdensome responsibility of defending the capital of the *Reich.*

The center was surrounded - *Zitadelle* sector - and command was given to *SS* Brigadeführer Mohnke . _ No one could enter without identification documents . Meanwhile, there was already fighting on the outskirts .

By evening, the Russians were masters of the Pankow district and had penetrated to the south as far as Zehlendorf and Tegelsee . On the Teltowkanal they clashed with the Volkssturm units organized by Lieutenant von Reuss . To the south-east, the *Nordland* Division burns its last tanks in a series of counterattacks to keep the enemy away from Tempelhof airfield. The fighting takes place in Adlershof and in Niederschöneweide where the *SS Sturmbannfüllre€* Sörensen, commander of the *Daninark* Regiment , falls . To the north, through Wedding and the Jungfernheide, the Russians try to reach the Berlin -Spandau canal . To the east, they are pressing in force on Frankfurter Allee and Friedrichshain . On the 24th , Weidling was appointed military commander of the city. His main assistant is Ba-

[3] Major [NdC].

renfänger. Barenfänger is the typical representative of the generation raised by National Socialism. Lieutenant, he earned the Knight's Cross ; major, the Oak Fronds ; at twenty-nine he is already a lieutenant colonel. A motto: “The task is not difficult for me!”. Hitler appoints him general and sends him to one of the most dangerous sectors of the city.

1125 April begins with a tremendous bombardment of Rotiusce . The "Stalin organs" deafen the defenders of Berlin while the Soviet infantry launches an attack from the shelter of the tanks. The Russians are trying to seize Tempelhof airport and undermine the entrance to the city center from the south-east. The Karsten warehouses are the epicenter of very violent clashes between Soviet infantry and *Wnffen SS*. In Steglitz, the Russians must overcome resistance from Hitler Youth units entrenched in the Botanical Garden. The boys of the *Hitler Youth* made a point of resistance in the Fichtenberg aqueduct tower ; artillery will be needed to wipe them out. Beyond Dahlem, Soviet tanks press the lead on Wilmersdorf. In evening Weidling moves his already threatened the da11'Hohenzol1erndamm to Bendlerstrasse. In Spandau, units of the Hitler Youth, commanded by 1 encircled leader of the *Napola SS Gruppenführer* Heissmayer, are by the Russians. From the north and the south the Russians are pushing to tighten the ribbon that cuts Berlin horizontally and which - from the Pichelsdorf bridge - with the names of Heerstrasse, Kaiserdamm, Bismarckstrasse , Charlottenburger Chaussee and - beyond the Brandenburg Gate - Unter den Linden, reaches Alexanderplatz. Alexanderplatz is the objective of the Soviet forces bursting in from the east: they fight at the Stock Exchange, at the General Markets. The German air force, with suicide flights , attempts to destroy the tanks that come forward on Land-sbergerstrasse and Frankfurterallee . Three hundred planes were lost in two days. To the west there is fighting in Grunewald and for Gatow airport, defended by cadets of the Air Force Academy.

On April 25, Berlin was definitively cut off from the rest of Germany . At Nauen, Zhukov's tanks met with those of Konev, closing the circle around the capital of the Reich . On the same day the Americans and Russians met in Torgau. But Hitler still hopes for a political solution to the conflict. Thus he speaks to his officers in the *Bunker* at the conference table :

"If it is true that difficulties have arisen between the Allies in San Francisco - and sooner or later they will arise - an upheaval could still occur , but only if I first succeed in dealing a blow to the Bolshevik giant . Perhaps then others will also be convinced that there is only one person in the world who can stop Bolshevism, and that is me, with the Party and the German people.

If fate then decides differently, I don't want to disappear from the world scene by fleeing ingloriously. I would consider myself a thousand times vile if I committed suicide on the Obersalzberg instead of resisting and falling here. And let no one come and tell me : "You, who are our *Führer,* should...". I am the *Führer* as long as I am able to truly command . But I certainly could n't command anyone anymore if I took refuge in a mountain : I have to exercise real authority over armies that obey me...

Once again the hordes of Asia did not stop with offers of surrender, but physically stopped them at some point. At the time we experienced how difficult it was to deal with Mo-lotov. And then we were at the peak of our power. Now here we are faced with the Great Khan of Asia who is moving towards the conquest of Europe. England already sees clearly that Bolshevism will spread beyond the limits assigned to it. It is time for the decisive battle . If I win this battle, I promise nothing for my personal glory. But at least I'll be rehabilitated...

For me there is no longer a problem. It is the last chance we are offered to at least defend our reputation. At some point it is necessary to break this excessive power of the Great Khan. The excessive power of all the Asian Khans always broke down on some specific point . This was the case at the time of the siege of Vienna. Now we are at the siege of Berlin. When Vienna repelled the Turks, their power did not immediately dissolve . But it was like a beacon of light. If Vienna had cowardly capitulated then, the Turks would have spread undisturbed throughout Europe."

Charlemagne

On April 26 , at dawn, the *Kampfgruppe Charlemagne* and the *Danmark* regiment , flanked by the *Norge* regiment , counterattacked.

canoe in the Neukölln district to relieve enemy pressure from Anhalter Bahnhof and Tempelhof airport . To the west , the Grunewald is the scene of fierce fighting. The battle in the streets has taken on atrocious aspects: the Russians set fire to buildings that they cannot conquer with flamethrowers . In the part of Berlin occupied by them , the civilian population - especially women - are game for the Red Army . Even the old communists of Berlin are shocked: the deputy Hildegard Rausch who lived in hiding waiting for the Russians is immediately raped despite her protests.

The behavior of the Russians rekindles the spirit of resistance. Every house is a fortress, every street a trench. The Red Army has in-vested Berlin with thousands of tanks, but all it takes is one guy with the *Panzerfaust* lurking around the corner to block an entire column. The Russians are trying to make their way through the underground of the subway. The floodgates open and hundreds of people drown. We defend ourselves ferociously, with rifle shots, hand grenades , daggers. On the still standing walls these writings appear: "Where the *Führer is,* there is victory!", "We retreat but we win", "Berlin remains German", or, more realistically, " Either victory , or Siberia".

Berlin is now practically cut off: you cannot land at Tempelhof and Gatow airports . The Ost-West Achse, the great east-west axis that cuts through Berlin passing through the Brandenburg Gate4, is being equipped as an aviation runway . Two *Junker* 52s manage to land there with a load of ammunition. Towards evening, another plane appears over the Ost-West Achse. It is the Knight von Greim, extremely loyal to the *Führer,* who wants to entrust him with command of the Air Force to replace Göring. And with him another German aviation ace , the female pilot Hanna Reitsch, decorated with the Iron Cross . A Soviet grenade wounds von Greim as he lands. Hanna Reitsch takes the controls and glides, amidst fearful oscillations , near the Brandenburg Gate . A car takes them to Hitler.

It is that "ribbon that cuts Berlin horizontally and which - from the Pichelsdorf bridge - with the names of Heerstrasse, Kaiserdamm, Bismarckstrasse, Charlottenburger Chaussee and - beyond the Brandenburg Gate - Unter den Linden , reaches Alexanderplatz" of which the Author spoke shortly before

Clouds of fog darken the sky. Fires light up the night like day. There is no water, no medicines , and the streets are full of corpses of civilians killed by grenades while looking for something to eat . The Hitler Youth bled themselves to keep open the bridge that looks towards the West , the Pichelsdorf Bridge .

All ears are now straining towards the West to catch the 1 thunder of Wenck 's guns — or at least the American ones . Wenck or the Americans - whoever comes now, but puts an end to the horror of the Russian victory .

THE FALL OF BERLIN

Wenck was the youngest general of the *Wehrmacht:* he was 45 years old. With three divisions, the *Karner,* the *Hiitten* and the *Scharnhorst,* he had been sent against the Americans on the E1ba. On April 23, Keitel came to him ordering him to reverse the front and rush to the defense of Berlin. Wenck tested the waters for a few days; then he saw the point of least Russian resistance in the direction of Trauenbrietzen-Juteborg and - with his back to the Americans - he ran towards the Red Army. With the strength of desperation, attacking a stronger enemy who was enveloping him from all sides, Wenck managed to open a passage. His soldiers - the last levies of the very young - fighting day and night headed for Berlin. Belzig was conquered, throwing havoc in the enemy rear, Beelitz was taken back, freeing 3,000 wounded. On April 27 , Wenck's vanguards were at Ferch, on the southwestern tip of Schwielowsee. The garrison of Potsdam, now a few kilometers away, broke the siege and ran to meet the liberators. Berlin was just 25 kilometers away.

The news of Wenck 's arrival spread like lightning across the blackened faces and parched mouths of Berlin's defenders. It gave a final impetus to the will to resist. The Russians were now close to the internal Pitti circle. The pillars were the four gigantic anti-aircraft towers: one in Friedrichs Hain, one in Humbo1dts Hain, and two at the Zoo. These concrete *bunkers* — forty meters high — can accommodate fifteen thousand people.

Hain means "grove". Friedrichs Hain and Humboldts Hain are other-st two neighborhoods of Berlin [NdC].

Many more are crowded there in conditions of incredible poverty and filth . The towers are all equipped with 128 mm anti-aircraft guns ; they can respond to the Russians ' fire , but only if they do not come below, into the dead corner. On the 27th, the Soviet tanks manage to surround the Friedrichs Hain tower : the defenders have to come out into the open with the *Panzerfäuste.*

To the north the fighting takes place in the Olympic Stadium , in Bülowstrasse, at Charlottenburg Palace . To the west, the Labor Service defends the Grunewald, the Hitler Youth the Pichelsdorf and Stössensee bridges : the Westhafen is the scene of violent clashes. To the east, the Russians try to conquer Alexanderplatz ; from his command, located at the Frankfurterallee underground station , Barenfänger gives them a hard time. The city is now a pile of rubble. We struggle to make our way through the ruins. Each connection between the various defense sectors requires long hours. On the afternoon of the 27th, Weidling dragged himself for the last time to the eastern outposts of Berlin. After hours of traveling through the rubble , I meet a pale, excited, but resolute Barenfänger. Any further resistance - says Weidling - is conditioned by the presence of weapons and ammunition, which are rapidly running out .

"Then – Barenfynger replies – we will fight with white weapons. We defend an idea." In the following days Barenfänger will be talked about a lot ; his name will become legendary even among the Russians. Somewhere - near the A1exanderplatz - Barenfänger fell in the last hours of Berlin.

Even the Reich Chancellery is now directly threatened .

At midday on the 27th, the situation at Hallesches Tor is dramatic . Bridges are blown up . The enemy pressure on Anhalter Bahnhof, on Belle-Alliance Platz, on Charlottenstrasse has become unsustainable . The units of the SS *Nordland ,* the *Danmark, Norge and Charlemagne* combat groups are fighting on this front .

The French launch a final counterattack on Belle-Alliance Platz; man for man, they hurl themselves at the tanks. The *Panzerfäuste* thunder, seven *T 34s* blow up and remain burning in the middle of the square, blocking the way for the others .

Waterlooplatz, Belle-Alliance Platz — names full of heavy memories for the French, and, of course, it is an irony of history that the Prussians needed them to defend these streets:

"What a singular name, Belle-Alliance, said Sergeant Bous-
sier, "in French in the text", so to speak...

Gauvin dropped the subject, for an instant he saw night fall on the gloomy plain of 18 June 1915 and the farm of Belle-Al-liance appeared to him, surrounded by smoke... Even down there it was the end.
What's the point of explaining to his comrades that , for German historians, Belle - Alliance was Waterloo?"[°].

A little further on , the Chancellery was now under the rain of grenades. The great halls designed by Albert Speer crumbled to the roar of cannons. The *Führerbunker* six meters below was shaking. Hanna Reitsch and Eva Braun worked hard to distract Goebbels ' children . Meanwhile, around the large military papers, Hitler and his entourage were wondering where Wenck was. In the shorthand text of the first *Lagebesprechutig'* of 27 April we read:

"Goebbels: "Wish to God Wenck would arrive! It's terrible to think about sarci: Wenck is in Potsdam and the Russians are at Potsdamerplatz!".

Hitler: "And I am not in Potsdam , but next to Potsda-merplatz. The only thing that gets on my nerves is that I wish I could do something and I can't do anything. I ca n't even sleep anymore: when I fall asleep, a grenade arrives. The point is this : whoever attacks and gradually advances will not break through. He breaks through whoever throws himself forward at full strength , shaking his fists like a madman! It's a question of temperament."

Voss: "Wenck is like that, *meter Führer!* But we need to see if he can do it on his own."

Hitler: "Try to imagine it; the news will spread like fire throughout Berlin: a German army has arrived from the west and has established a connection with the city. The Russians will have no choice but to continually throw in new forces to keep their positions not too far apart from each other . We will make the city a major attrition point . The Russians lost a large part of their forces in the Oder crossing ,

° Saint Paulien, *dead lions* , Volpe, Rome 1967, p. 127 [NdA].

3 Letter "Discussion of the situation": these are military conferences recorded in shorthand in the Reich Chancellery . The last three *Lagebesprechungen,* dated 23, 25 and 27 April 1945, published for the first time in 1966, were collected and commented by the Author in A. Hitler, *The Battle of Berlin,* Edizioni di Ar, Padova 1970 [NdC].

especially their north wing. Furthermore, they are wearing out huge forces in street fighting. If every day we destroy 50 *Stalins* and *T 34s* in ten days we will have destroyed 500 to 600 of their tanks.

Now I would like to lie down in peace for a while , and only wake up if a Russian tank arrives in front of my bedroom door ... There is no other means of causing serious damage to the enemy than the one we are using. We had to keep Berlin because this is where the Russians will bleed out...".

* * * * *

As the hours passed , it became increasingly clear that Wenck had run out of steam. The Russians had recovered from their surprise, and were counterattacking from all sides. Wenck remained in his advanced positions for two more days to allow the Busse Army to reunite with him. For ten days now the Busse Army had lost all connections and had been retreating from the Oder front in the midst of enemy columns that were overtaking it on all sides . On April 29, Busse's thirty thousand men reached Wenck. They were a grey, exhausted mass . Next to the only surviving wagon , a man, on foot, worn out, approached Wenck and hugged him: it was Busse, Wenck had not recognized him before. Under those conditions, the Busse Army certainly could not march to liberate Berlin. Wenck packed it onto trains and sent it westward.

Throughout the day of April 28 , Hitler waited for news from Wenck.
The Soviet tanks were trying to break into the center from all sides : the Spittelmarkt, the Alexanderplatz, the Potsdamerplatz were now swept by machine guns. The conditions of the civilian population were miserable and 10,000 injured people crowded into hospitals without medicine or light.

In the evening some news arrived. But it was n't Wenck's. It was a press release from the Reuter Agency from which it appeared that the *SS Reichsführer* Himmler had made proposals to the Allies. The Allies had rejected all negotiations.

The supreme leader of the SS had been troubled by a crisis for some time . On the one hand there was his bond of loyalty to Hitler, on the other

pressure from his collaborators for political negotiations . Hitler's decision to remain in besieged Berlin had pushed Himmler to act. Already on 23 April Himmler had met with Count Bernadotte at the Swedish consulate in Lübeck . "The noble life of the Niifirer , " Himmler began , " is coming to an end...". Then Himmler had exposed the suffering of the German people, the atrocities of the Russians, and had foreseen the danger that the red wave would spread over Scandinavia and the West. Himmler had asked Bernadotte to inform General Eisenhower that the *SS Reichsführer* was offering to surrender to the West to allow the German people to continue fighting in the East.

Himmler was convinced that he still had great power (the SS, the Ministry of the Interior, the Army, Territorial). There was also a great naivety, the belief that the Allies could deal with him who was most directly responsible for the extermination of the Jews. Himmler knew this, but he also knew that the cruelties committed by his SS were certainly no greater than those that Bolshevism had perpetrated in the East since 1917. He knew that millions of men had been killed on Stalin's orders , that the his GESTAPO was a dull imitation of the NKVD, which communism systematically annihilated entire populations and social classes. And he could not believe that the Americans, who were allied with the greatest murderer in world history — Stalin — would take their principles so literally . He could not understand the singular concept of humanity and democracy of the Americans, for whom the crimes of the Nazis were atrocious , those of the Russians trifles, and who while they condemned millions of men to death by handing them over to Stalin , while they phosphorus bombed Dresden and Hamburg, they still believed they were fighting for humanity and democracy, so as not to be able to dirty their hands by dealing with Himmler .

A few days later Eisenhower 's response arrived : the German capitulation had to be simultaneous and unconditional on both the Allied and Russian fronts . And now Hitler learned from the Reuter agency that, while his will was strained in the defense of Berlin, Himmler - *der treue Einrich,* "the faithful Henry " - was negotiating with the Americans.

Hitler 's anger exploded very violently. Göring had already taken action

struck against him when he had telegraphed whether - since the *Fiihrer* was isolated - he could assume his functions, according to the provisions for the succession of 1941. Himmler also found himself exposed to Hitler 's wrath , an anger which Bormann did not fail to stoke. Hitler's indignation grew even more when he was told that *SS Gruppenfiihrer* Fegelein, having left the *Bunker,* had been found in his *garqonniere* in civilian clothes. Fegelein owed everything to Hitler, he had risen to the high ranks of the SS because he had married Eva Braun's sister. Furthermore , Fegelein was the representative of Himmler and the SS to the *Fiihrer.* Fegelein's defection was now compounded by Himmler's betrayal: suddenly Hitler demanded to understand why Steiner had not attacked, why the SS had not committed itself to Berlin.

A field court sentenced Fegelein to death and he was shot in the Chancellery garden. Eva Braun didn't say a word in her favor. Then, Hitler ordered von Greim and Hanna Reitsch to leave immediately for Northern Germany to communicate Himmler's dismissal to the army. The two protested that they rather wanted to remain in the *Bunker* to await death with Hitler. Finally, they were persuaded to leave. Von Greim was still wounded, and Hanna Reitsch took the controls. It was night, and the sky was crossed by a thousand Soviet rockets and grenades. The only runway available was the east-west axis, the large avenue of *Tier8arten*[4] cleared of dirt by bombs. Only an ace would have managed to take off in those conditions. But Hanna Reitsch was ace; he had risked his life several times testing new types of aircraft. With incredible daring he took to the skies amidst the crossfire of artillery and anti-aircraft. Up to 7,000 meters, the explosions shook the device like a feather. From there, they still saw Berlin burning like a torch. Then they headed north .

Hitler 's wedding _

That night, Hitler made an unexpected decision: he married Eva Braun. Perhaps it was the certainty of having reached the

[4] The zoo [NdC].

the end and the desire to settle everything behind himself , perhaps the bitterness for Himmler's defection made him appreciate more the loyalty of a simple girl who had spontaneously come to Berlin to die with him . A municipal councilor was tracked down and — in his presence, according to the law — Hitler and Eva Braun became husband and wife. A small refreshment followed ; old times were recalled , until tears took over those present.

Then Hitler took his leave and retired with his secretaries to dictate to them this private will :

"During the years of struggle I did not believe I could take on the responsibility of marriage, but now, having reached the end of this earthly existence of mine, I have decided to marry the girl who, after years of faithful friendship, came of her own free will . to share my destiny in the now surrounded city . By his wish he dies like my wife. Death thus makes us what my duties towards the Nation deprived us of in life.

What I own - for what little it is worth - will belong to the Party. If the Party no longer exists, to the State. Even if the State no longer exists, any other provision of mine is superfluous .

Over the last few years I have been collecting paintings, not for my own private interest, but so that one day I can set up a painting gallery in my hometown of Linz. It is my deepest wish that this legacy be implemented .

I appoint my faithful comrade Martin Bormann as executor . He is authorized to carry out my wishes.

He is allowed to put aside anything that may have the value of a personal memory, or that may serve to guarantee a modest bourgeois existence for my brothers, and above all for my wife's mother , and for my old collaborators , men and women, secretaries , especially *Fran* Winter, who assisted me in my work for many years .

My wife and I choose death to escape the shame of deposition and capitulation. It is our wish to be cremated in the place where for twelve years I worked daily in the service of the German people.

Done in Berlin, 29 April 1945, 4 o'clock .
Signed: Adolf Hitler

Testimonials: Martin Bormann, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Nikolaus von Below".

After the private will, Hitler dictated the following political will:

" More than thirty years have now passed since, in 1914, I put my modest energies at the service of the German nation forced to go to war. In these three decades I have always acted, thought and lived in love and faithfulness to my people. Thus I found the strength to make the most burdensome decisions that have ever fallen to a mortal. In these thirty years I have used all my time, I have used up all my work force and all my health.
the.

It is not true that I or any other German wanted the war in 1939. It was wanted exclusively by foreign statesmen who were of Jewish origin or worked in the interests of the Jews. I have made too many offers of arms control for posterity not to conclude that I am not responsible for this war . After the unfortunate outcome of the First World War, I did not want another one to break out against England and America. Centuries will pass , but from the ruins of our cities and our monuments hatred will always rise against the true culprit: international Judaism with its allies ...

If the peoples of Europe are handled like bundles of shares by these emissaries of finance and international capitalism, we must denounce the person truly responsible for this fatal conflict : Judaism. But I warned that this time millions of Aryan children of European nations would not die of hunger, nor would hundreds of thousands of women and children perish in the flames and under the bombs, without the real culprits paying the price, even if only in increasingly less painful form.

After six years of a struggle which - despite the defeats - will one day go down in history as the most splendid and courageous manifestation of a people's will to survive, I cannot abandon the capital of the ***Reich.*** My strength is not enough to counter the enemy's assault and my resistance is sabotaged by short-sighted and characterless men. I therefore wish to confuse my fate with that of millions of other men by remaining in the city. Not

I will thus fall into the hands of the enemy, who always needs new shows orchestrated by the Jews to amuse his masses.

I have therefore decided to stay in Berlin and to kill myself the moment I see that the seat of the *Fiihrer* and the Chancellor can no longer be defended any longer . I will die happy thinking of the great deeds of our soldiers at the front, of our women at home, of the great efforts of the workers and peasants, and of the youth who have entered history bearing my name.

It is right that I express my thanks to all of them, that I recommend them to never abandon the fight, but to always continue it against the enemies of the homeland, according to the dictates of our great Clausewitz. Thus - from the sacrifice of our soldiers, and from my reunion with them in death - will one day arise the seed of the splendid rebirth of the National Socialist movement which will be able to create a new national community.

Many men and women of great courage have fearlessly decided to link their fate with mine in the hour of the end. I begged them - and then ordered them - not to do such a thing, but to continue fighting with the Nation .

Although many of these men came to me, like Martin Bormann and Dr. Goebbels, even with their families, and did not want to leave the capital, preferring to wait for death with me , I must ask them to fulfill my requests. requests and to put the benefit of the Nation before their feelings. With their action and their comradely loyalty, they will be able to be equally close to me when I am dead, when my spirit - as is my hope - will be with them and will always accompany them. May they know how to be harsh but not unjust, may they not be influenced by fear in all their actions, but may place the honor of the Nation above all else . And finally, let us be aware of this, that our task of building a National Socialist state is a mission of centuries ; everyone must therefore feel obliged to sacrifice their own profit to the interests of all.

I demand of all Germans and all National Socialists, men and women, from all the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht,* obedience and loyalty until death to the new Government and the new President.

I oblige the Head of State and the citizens to observe the racial laws more scrupulously and to fight mercilessly .

ably against the universal poisoning of peoples: international Judaism .

Done in Berlin, 29 April 1945, 4 o'clock .
Signed: Adolf Hitler

Testimony: Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Martin Bormann, Wilchelm Burgdorf, Hans Krebs."

qqggq

While Hitler was dictating his will - on the morning of April 29th — the Soviets, with a successful coup, had seized the Moltke Bridge, crossing the Spree in front of the *Reichstag*. An avalanche of fire had greeted them . The Germans targeted them from the Ministry of the Interior, from the Kroll Oper, from the A1senstrasse. But the Russians had managed to stay on this side of the river.

It is the morning of April 29th. The *Katiusce* darken the sky and shatter what remains of the rubble of Berlin . Now the fighting is 700 meters from the Chancellery. Potsdamer Platz is a battlefield. The Nordland men make the Russian columns that go up Wilhelm Friedrich and Saarland Strasse pay for *every* meter . Along Wilhelmstrasse — the street of the Ministries
— you arrive at the Chancellery. But Wilhelmstrasse is blocked by a commando from the SS *Charlemagne* . There are those who blow up their fourth , their fifth wagon. *Unterscharf"whreF* Vaulot earns - first of the French - the *Ritterkreuz6* . Oberscharführer' Apollot destroys six tanks in a few hours . Captain Weber, former Charlemagne instructor , destroys his thirteenth tank. Apol-lot and Weber are also decorated with the Knight's Cross . Germany no longer has bread or water to give to its defenders , but it still has iron crosses in abundance.

The last phase of the resistance has begun. To the east, the Russians have taken the Alexanderplatz and are advancing towards the Palace that once belonged to the Hohenzollern. Friedrichs Hain 's tower lowered its guns when the Russians tied German girls to the tank turrets . The neighborhood of Moabit is searched house by house. Yes com-

[5] Sergeant [NdC].
[6] Knight's Cross [NdC].
[7] Marshal [NdC].

beats at the Ministry of the Interior - in front of the *Reichstag* - and a battalion of SS is massacred there , man by man. Only in the early night hours of April 30th did the Russians take complete possession of the building. From there they overlook the *Reichstag,* which looms with its derelict bulk and the large writing on the façade: "To the German people".

From the centre, the defense area extends across the *Tiergarter* to the western part of Berlin. At the Westkreuz, at the Ha-lensee, we fight to the last man. The Hitler Youth defends the Stössensee and Pichelsdorf bridges against any attack. He will defend them until the end. Here is what Colonel Boldt who passed through on his sortie towards the West reports:

"In flat trenches, in front of the Pichelsdorf bridge, on both sides of the Heerstrasse, stood Hitler Youth with *Panzerfäuste ,* alone or in groups of two. Dawn had broken and the dark shapes of massive Russian tanks loomed in the sky. Their cannons were aimed at the bridge... After searching for a few hours in the stretch of woods that runs along the road, we found the leader of the combat groups... When we introduced ourselves, he told us about the vicissitudes of his unit: "When the fighting began five days ago , there were 5,000 boys from the Hitler Youth and some soldiers... Of the 5,000 boys, just 500 remain .
We don't have any reserves , there isn't even the possibility of taking turns to allow the kids to get some sleep ." We proceeded further, and the foreman, *Oberg ebiet iihrer* Schlunderfi, added bitterly: "The worst thing for my boys is when on clear nights the desperate cries of women and girls are heard"»'.

... *a can of petrol...*

From the bridgehead held in the West by the *Hftlerjugend,* the part of Berlin still defended runs eastwards along the Kurfürstendamm , the *Tiergarten* and the Ministerial district with the Unter den Linden.
In the Spittelmarkt, a Norwegian *Nordland* regiment con-

G. Boldt, *The Last Days,* Hamburg, p. 86 [NDA].

thwarts every advance of the Russians. The Danes join them in Leipzigerstrasse . The Flemings and the Dutch fight at the Zoo. Latvians preside over the Reichstog together with the Germans . Europe, this reality pursued in vain amidst the discord and misunderstandings of war, is realized for a brief moment on the blood - soaked pavement of Berlin .

On April 29 , the newspaper from besieged Berlin , *Der Panzerhàr ,* appears for the last time . Under the large headlines on the front page , it reports the Wehrmaclit bulletin :

"The High Command of the Armed Forces announces :

In the heroic struggle of the city of Berlin, the epic struggle of the German people against the Bolsheviks is once again manifested to the world.

we are.

While the capital is being defended in a grandiose and unique battle in history, our troops on the Elbe have turned their backs on the Americans to relieve the burden of the defenders of Berlin with their attack ...".

Alongside, is a leading article entitled *Der la•8ere Atem,* "the longest breath ":

"...In Berlin, among the smoking ruins of the capital of the *Reich,* the fate of Europe is decided , from which you cannot separate yours , comrade! Think about it carefully, grit your teeth and resist, faithful to your oath , aware of the responsibility you have towards posterity , your mother, your wife, your children.

The answer of destiny is about to be pronounced, you cannot escape it or postpone it. We must not give up in hardness and tenacity! The Soviets do everything they can to strangle us before the German reinforcements can thwart their diabolical plan and dispel the red threat ...

The Kremlin knows it has no time to waste: it's a matter of hours.
But we must , and will , hold our breath longer than they do . "

On the third page, the reporter of a *PK (Propagandakompcinie:* this is the name of the reporters of the German army) reports his impressions *of* the visit to an outpost of the Norge battalion : " Es *ist alles vorn ",* "they are all ahead":

"In front of the entrance to a ruined house in the south- west of Berlin , a battalion insignia . A white cross

ca on a red field . It is the command post of the *Norge* Combat Group . I go down to the cellar. On the last step there is a messenger, jacket, helmet, machine gun, dirty face and hands . And exhausted, he slowly takes a drag on his cigarette. He puts out the cigarette butt and places it carefully in a worn paper bag .

The command post is empty . I ask the messenger where the officers are . "They're all ahead," he replies in uncertain German . Then he gets up, and very carefully puts together a second cigarette .

Who makes him do it, this Norwegian volunteer from WeJen *SSI* Why doesn't he rather go for a walk along the Prinz-Johann Gate in Oslo, stopping in front of the bright windows of William Smith, with his girlfriend next to him ...

So many things it could do! Instead, he runs from here to there, among the smoking craters opened incessantly by the Soviet bombings . . .

To the devil! Does he really need it? Could n't he stay in Oslo and play tennis instead ? But no , he cannot play tennis while German soldiers in Berlin fight for Europe ...

This exhausted, exhausted messenger knows that not all his compatriots think like him . He knows it, and this sometimes pains him , it pains him a lot. He often thought about it , in front of Leningrad, on Wolchow, in Toropez, in East Prussia ; but he always had to stay "forward", "forward" against the Bolsheviks, far from his homeland.

day.

Already often in the last few days, the command group has had to grab the machine gun, the commander give orders in position ,
in some cellar. Yet, they still resist , Dutch, Flemish , Danes, Norwegians. They are the activists of Europe. And they fight because the epic struggle in Berlin decides the fate of Europe. This is what they know, this is what they believe, and therefore "they are all ahead".

* * * * *

On that day of April 29 , once the last storm caused by Himmler 's "betrayal" had passed , Hitler appeared to everyone to be at peace . The formidable nervous tension that had dominated him since the beginning of the war, the obstinate will to win, which had not

must be left until the last, they seemed to have succumbed to resignation before death.

It allowed three officers to attempt a sortie westward. He also begged Goebbels to leave the *Bunker* and reach safety with his wife and children. He then called a doctor to poison his she - wolf, Blondie, and her cubs painlessly. Towards evening, he received the military leaders for the last time .

Weidling - as he had done the evening before - insisted on a sortie. The ammunition was exhausted. The suffering of the population, unspeakable. Tens of thousands of people crowded into the zoo *bunkers ;* someone was dead, but there was no room for them to fall to the ground. Axmann joined Weidling ; _ he too asked for a sortie; he guaranteed with his life and with the honor of the Hitler Youth that the *Fiih-rer* would emerge unscathed, without falling into the hands of the enemy. Hitler rejected their proposals less harshly than the day before, but not without a tired tenacity. "Why on earth – he asked in a dejected voice – should I wander around like a fugitive in the Bran-deburg woods?". He then asked how much longer Berlin could be held. Weidling and Mohnke agreed that the resistance would not last more than twenty-four hours. He then telegraphed to Keitel to find out where the liberating armies were . Around one o'clock this reply came:

" Wenck 's vanguards are south of the Schwielowsee.
The 12th Army cannot continue its attack on Berlin.
The 9th Army is surrounded on all sides.
The Holste Army Group is forced onto the defensive."

It was the end, and Hitler understood it. Around 4 in the morning he said goodbye to his entourage with significant handshakes . Then, he lay down for the last time, without undressing.

On the morning of April 30, the Russians attacked the *fieic/tsiag.* The square in front of the building had been transformed into a minefield: fences and barricades obstructed it . Hundreds of cannons and *katiushes* spewed fire at the heavy construction. A hurricane of fire hits it from all sides: the tower, packed with machine guns, collapses into the void, dragging men and weapons with it .
It's 1.30pm . The Russians rush forward under heavy German fire. But the Königsplatz is an entire trench: ditches hinder them , mines explode, dozens, hundreds of them fall , at the end of the

von throw themselves to the ground. The first attack was stopped. Many more will follow.

That morning Hitler had appeared just before noon. He had left a message for Weidling finally authorizing him to attempt the sortie. Then he gave his driver, Kempka, his final order: to find him 200 liters of petrol to burn his body .

The last moments of his life were described to us by his waiter Linge:

"At midday, with a cool and calm attitude, he said that he wanted to have lunch with his wife for the last time . The lunch was very frugal, more frugal than the last few times, because now
the supplies were finished. Immediately afterwards Hitler took leave of his collaborators in the antechamber. Eva Braun was pale, sleepy, but in control of her nerves. She thanked me for what I had done for her and said: "If one day you meet my sister, *Frau* Fegelein, don't tell her how her husband died here." Then he went to Goebbels ' wife's room , and Hitler returned to his study.

Shortly afterwards Günsche, Hitler's aide, appeared and said that ***Frau*** Goebbels wanted to speak to the Führer once again . In the morning, he had given her his gold Party badge in recognition of the courage she had shown all those days .
Hitler went to *Frau* Goebbels and I accompanied him . Doctor Goebbels welcomed us in the antechamber and said to Hitler: *"Mein F'ührer,* why don't you try to leave Berlin escorted by the *Hitler Youth?".*
"Doctor," replied Hitler, "you know my decision. I won't change it , but you can leave Berlin with your family."
Goebbels replied in turn : "No - my *Führer* - in my last speech I promised that in my capacity as *Gauleiter* I would not abandon Berlin, but would remain there with my entire family. It's a promise I want to keep." Then, the two shook hands in silence . Hitler went to Mrs. Goebbels and took leave of her too.

Then he came back with me. It was 3.45pm . When we reached the door of his room, I told him that I wanted to say hello too. Hitler said to me : "Linge, I have given orders for all these people to leave Berlin in small groups . Join them, and try to go towards the West."
"My *Führer,"* I asked him, "and now for whom

will we still have to fight?". Hitler shook my hand and said : *"F"ur den koininenden Mcmn!",* " for the man who will come!".

I stiffened in greeting, then went towards the exit of the *Bunker.* I didn't want to see or hear anything anymore . Some escort officers asked me why I was so upset. Unable to speak , I returned to the *Btiilker.* In the courtyard I found Giinsche and Bormann. I could smell gunpowder . *"Hey Reiclisleiter* – I said to Bormann –

es mtiss passiert serie", "it must have already happened". Next to them were Goebbels , Axmann, Burgdorf and Krebs.

I didn't want to go into Hitler's room alone and asked Bormann to accompany me. We entered the study. In front of the door there was a light colored sofa , with a flowered fabric . Hitler stood on the left side. Eva on the right one. Both were dead. Hitler 's face was not composed . He had shot himself with his 7.65 *Waltlier* right next to his right eye, and the blood had flowed down his cheek, staining the sofa and forming a small puddle on the carpet. The pistol had slipped from his left hand and was lying on the ground, next to a small 6.35 caliber pistol, which he always carried with him in a pocket of his trousers . The head was slightly bent forward , the right hand open, abandoned on the knees.

Eva Braun was sitting on the sofa with her legs curled up. I didn't see any wounds on his body, but I observed that his lips were closed and his face was ashen. On the table in front of her was the box of cyanide capsules supplied by the SS. I had no doubts:
she had poisoned herself, and death must have been instantaneous .

Bormann left the room and called for help. I no longer knew what to think, and I began to mechanically carry out the painful task that Hitler had assigned to me . With the help of another , I wrapped the *Fiillrer* 's body in a brown blanket , and then carried him through the fire exit into the garden . Behind me came Kempka, Hitler 's driver , with Eva Braun 's salt flat . Eva was wearing a light blue dress with white *polka dots ,* and the cuffs were also white. I think it was Italian silk , just as the red patent leather shoes were Italian .

The two bodies were placed next to each other immediately afterwards the door step . Then we poured on them the petrol that the *Fiihrer* had instructed me to prepare and which had been found I don't know where by Giinsche and Kempka .

Outside, there was hell. Part of the Chancellery and the adjacent buildings were on fire. The wind caused by the explosion of the Russian grenades was so strong that we were unable to set the petrol on fire . So I went back down to the *Bunker,* took a bundle of the latest press releases that had been passed to Hitler, rolled them up , and Bormann lit them . When the flame was bright enough , I threw the roll of paper on the bodies which immediately caught fire .

Goebbels, Axmann, Krebs, Burgdorf and the others had climbed onto the steps of the observatory tower and stiffened in greeting . We remained watching the flames for about five minutes ...".

While Hitler 's remains were burning in the Chancellery garden , the battle for the Reichstag was in full swing . Under the protection of a very violent artillery fire , the Russians repeat their attacks . At 6pm, a new wave of the assault begins . Hundreds of them fall , the flag of victory - the red flag that must fly from the top of the *Reichstag* - passes from hand to hand , bloody. Finally , the door is gutted with mortar fire . We fight in the hall, in the smoke and in the darkness. We fight room by room, with daggers and hand grenades . The Germans machine-gun from the upper floors. The Latvians hate the Russians, who have subjugated their homeland, and make them pay every step of the way. Floor by floor, the Russians rise , but when evening falls the resistance nuclei in *the Rerchstag* are not yet extinguished .

The final battle for Kurfiirstendamm and the Zoo has begun: it is fought at Savigny Platz, on Niirnberger Strasse, near the intersection with Budapester Strasse . The Elisabetta Hospital, in Liitzow Strasse, falls into the hands of the Russians who burst in , shooting in the wards and raping the patients by spilling glasses of vodka on them . The screams are atrocious, several women throw themselves out of the window; at a certain point a wing of the hospital collapses, dragging victims and persecutors.

Hitler is dead , but the Waffen *SS commandos* are still fighting near the Chancellery . We fight out of anger, out of desperation , out of competition. Stalin wants Berlin to fall on May 1st , and they don't want to give him this satisfaction. The front is now broken into many fragments of resistance . Everyone wages "his" war , against " his" Russians, out of sporting spirit . The Knight 's Cross is awarded for every 7 enemy Cairos destroyed and each _

le die with his *Ritterkreuz* around his neck. The Scandinavians have looted a Wehrmacht warehouse : they bet a bottle of *Schnaps* for every Russian tank blown up. Russian drivers are panicking. To make them continue, many political commissioners have to point the gun at them.

I SOLDIER JEGOROV E CARRIER

Meanwhile, the night of May 1st fell . After ferocious melees , even the second plan of the *Reichsta8* gave way. The way to the roof is now free. Soldiers Yegorov and Kantanyya climb up it. From there, they see Berlin as a sea of flames in the night. Next to it, the Brandenburg Gate . Further on is the Chancellery, where Hitler's ashes already lie extinguished. They unfurl the red flag entrusted by the Command of the Third Assault Army and hoist it into the night sky. Stalin triumphs over Germany and Europe.

The lights of May 1st rise . Much to the annoyance of the Russians, Berlin still resists. The surviving French still guard Leipzigerstrasse a block from the Chancellery . Germans, Latvians, Danes defend the Zoo and the Brandenburg Gate . The *Tiergarten* is a battlefield . To celebrate Labor Day, the Soviet Air Force delivered an extra dose of bombs to the Zoo *Bunker ,* whose cannons were still firing. 30,000 women, children and elderly people are crowded inside , in indescribable conditions . The Soviets occupy the Gedáchtniskirche, angrily defended by the SS. They take the Weidedammerbrücke, the Bendlerbrücke - a few tens of meters from Weidling 's headquarters.

Weidling sees that every line of defense has collapsed. He received Hitler's note authorizing him to attempt the sortie, but it included

' In the first edition of the book the title of this chapter is *soldiers Se8 - rov and Kontarìy,* - in the body of the same, the two Russian soldiers appear as Yegorov and Kontarìy ; in a caption, the names are Jegorv and Kontarij. R. Cartier in his *Second World War* (Mondadori, Milan 1968, p. 611 vol. II; ed. or. 1965) reports the names of sergeants Yegorov and Kantanija.

now ready to the idea of surrender. News of Hitler's death begins to circulate. The younger ones don't want to believe it , and demand that it be resisted to the bitter end. Incidents break out: when German parliamentarians cross the lines with the white flag, *SS Brigadefiihrer* Krukenberg threatens them with a pistol .

Meanwhile, in the Reich Chancellery , Dr. Goebbels prepares to die . He has long since drawn up his Appendix *to the* Fiihrer *'s political testament :*

"The *FH/mer* has ordered me to leave Berlin if it cannot be further defended and to assume my responsibilities in the government designated by him. For the first time in my life , I find myself forced to disobey an order from the *Fiihrer.* My wife and children join me in this decision.

For reasons of humanity and personal loyalty I cannot abandon the *Fiihrer* in this very sad hour. Otherwise , I would have to consider myself a coward and a renegade, who - together with the respect of the German people - would also lose that self - respect which constitutes the first condition for participating in the future reconstruction of the *Reich* and the German nation.

In the delirium of betrayal that surrounds the *Fiihrer* in these last days of the war, there must at least be men ready to follow him unconditionally into death, even against the formal and rationally justified order that he gave us in his will .

In this way I believe I will be rendering a better service to the German people in their future. For the difficult times that are ahead , examples will be more necessary than men capable of showing the path of recovery to the nation, but it will not be possible to rebuild the life of our homeland without clear examples clearly visible to everyone . ...".

On the evening of May 1st , the Goebbels poisoned their children. They were given a sleeping pill and cyanide capsules were inserted between their teeth. Then, arm in arm they go up the stairs that lead to the Chancellery garden . At the exit, two gunshots ring out : a guard, as preordained, has killed them . The bodies are hastily set on fire.

There is now a rush in the *Bunker.* The Russians could arrive at any moment . The survivors organize themselves for the sortie. There is the lf-

Party leader , *Reichsleiter* Bormann; there is the Leader of the Hitler Youth , Axmann; there is the Undersecretary of Propaganda, Naumann; there are waiters , drivers , secretaries . That leaves generals Burgdorf and Krebs who brought the poison to Rommel in October 1944 . Now, they too are preparing to kill themselves.

It is 9 in the evening when, sheltered by the last *Tiger,* the column goes up Friedrichstrasse . At Weidedammer Brilcke they are there the Russians. The *Tiger* blows up . We detour in the direction of the Lehrter Bahnhof. We further divide into small groups to pass between the front lines . Mohnke and Hitler 's secretaries will fall into the hands of the Russians; Axmann C Naumann will reach the West. Bormann disappears. Axmann would later say that he saw him lying as if dead in the light of the fires.

On that night of May 2 , Weidling offers surrender to the Soviet Command . After the capture of the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, Berlin 's defense has now shriveled up into two areas, from the Pichelsdorf Bridge to the *Tiergarten ,* and a small area in the Ministries district . At 5 am Weidling handed himself over to the Russians with his General Staff . For seven days - since Hitler forced him to take on the defense of Berlin - he has hardly slept. With a trembling hand he signs the capitulation.

A group of drunk Russian generals surround him : one wants to hear him recite poetry , another asks him the names of the record holders of the 1936 Olympics . Then he and his officers put him back on a truck and is driven around the whole Berlin. They see hundreds of Soviet tanks pouring into the city; civilians assigned to forced labor ; columns of prisoners headed towards the East.

Grey, ragged, hungry, the last defenders of Berlin march on foot towards Siberia . Russian soldiers surround them shouting: *"G/ii-tler kaputt !",* then begin to strip them of their rings and watches . Civilians are separated from the military . The cries of the women being dragged away can be heard . The auxiliaries of Mohnke 's command will meet a horrible end: the Russians rape them , then behead them , and play with their heads.

Without hearing or feeling anything anymore , Weidling meets his fate . 10 years of Lubianka and death in a foreign land await him . An account of his military operations in Berlin, written in prison, will be published by the Rivista clell'Esci'cit (›

Soviet with the title *The mortal struggle of the fascist clique in Berlin.*

But not everyone is willing to capitulate. General Mummert, commander of the *Muncheberg* Division - who a few days earlier had threatened to have the SS special courts shot at if they bothered his soldiers - has made it known that he will not surrender to the Russians, but will attempt the sortie.

His men, together with thousands of soldiers and civilians, gather at the Spandau Bridge . On May 3rd the desperate race towards freedom begins :

"As soon as the first pale morning ray appears on the horizon of the burning city, the cannons roar. Armored infantry, artillery and SS come running behind. Meter by metre, we advance towards the bridge. Mummert leads the way. It doesn't seem like the Russians have understood yet. The general turns to his soldiers - his hands in a funnel around his mouth - and shouts:

"Bayonet in the chamber! On the assault! *Marsch!".*

The men charge off. A booming *"Hurra!"* echoes this morning on the Havel. The Russians are surprised. For a few seconds. Then their weapons respond. The clicking of machine guns and the whine of howitzers can be heard . The citadel's cannons were soon added . The soldiers of the *Müncheberg,* of the *Nordland,* of the 18th *Panzer Grenadier,* can no longer hold back. The assault begins. The assault on the Have1 bridge in Spandau-West.

Soldiers of every rank and every weapon, Bavarians and North Germans , Saxons and Prussians, Westphalians, Silesians, French, Spanish, Scandinavians, Latvians, Dutch, women from Berlin, children, adolescents, girls, old men; they are those who rushed against the Russian lines on the dawn of May 3rd . The bridge over the Have1 vibrates under the footsteps of the attackers.

Enemy grenades, explosive rockets and machine gun volleys open horrible holes. Men fall in heaps, the wounded remain on the ground, fall into the water or are trampled to death. But forward!
After you! The last guns, tanks, tractors, trucks roll forward. They roll over the dead, the wounded, the fallen. From the bridge, a river of blood rains down into Have1.

Hartmann, Reinwart, Ramlau and the others are in the lead. They shout their anger, their hatred, their horror in the enemy's face. Ur-

They say "HHrrÔ!", they throw themselves on the enemy outposts at the end of the bridge. They fire in a burst , throwing their last bombs, they attack with the butts of their rifles. Behind them come Spanish and French SS . They shout *"Vive la France!", "Arriba España!".* They no longer care about the cries of the comrades left behind. Sergeant Vaulot falls at the head of his group. A Russian bullet hits him a few centimeters above the Knight 's Cross "2 .

General Mummert also falls at the head of his soldiers. Most are mowed down by Soviet artillery fire or fall into Russian hands . But many manage to pass and, in small groups, crossing the woods, reach the American lines.

This was the end of the last defenders of Berlin.

Already the last German radio , after a roll of drums, had announced Hitler 's death to the world .

" Headquarters announces that — this afternoon — our Führer , Adolf Hitler, fell for Germany in his command of the Reich Chancellery , fighting against Bolshevism until his last breath. On April 30 , the *F'ührer* appointed Grand Admiral Dönitz as his successor."

Very loud, then vibrant and broken, then still loud, dark, solemn, the notes of Siegfried's funeral march had resounded from the *Twilight of the Gods.*

2W. Haupt, M *fall of Berlin,* Sugar, Milan 1965, pp. 202-203 [Editor's note]. Although in the first edition A. Romualdi cites the Italian translation of Haupt 's book (edited by Emanuele Farina), the passage cited here is in a different version from that which appears in that edition. It can be deduced that he therefore used and retranslated the German original [NdC].

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